

## Special **MILLION** Issue (The Magazine of Popular Fiction)

### profiles

**J G B**ALLARD

**DAVID M**ORRELL

**TERRY P**RATCHETT

**A NNE R**ICE

### features

**Daniel Easterman**

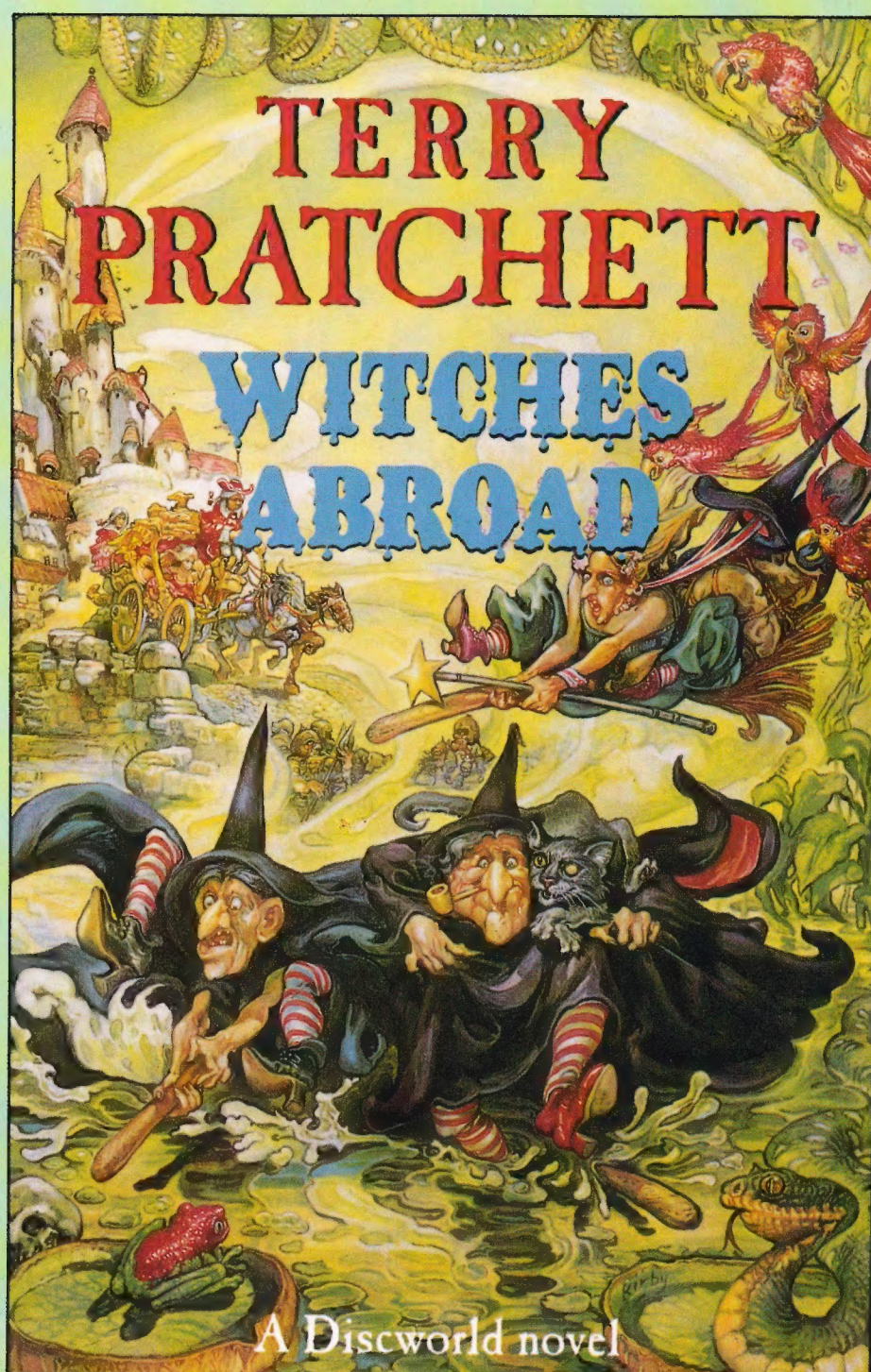
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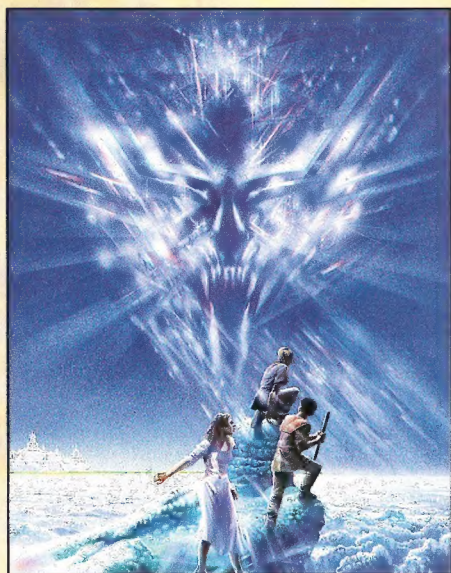
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# interzone

**SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY****No 51****September 1991**

## Important Notice to Librarians and to All *MILLION* and *Interzone* Subscribers

This is *Interzone* 51, the September issue, but it is also *MILLION* number 5, the September-October issue. We are running the two magazines together for this one occasion only. Next month, *Interzone* will revert to its normal mix of fiction and non-fiction, and two months from now *MILLION* will reappear in its usual guise.

Meanwhile, all *Interzone* subscribers have an opportunity to sample *MILLION*'s unique flavour – and those who already subscribe to both magazines will be compensated by having their *Interzone* subscription extended by one issue. Contents overleaf...

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**Cover by Josh Kirby for Pratchett's 'Witches Abroad'**

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**Note:** A couple of *MILLION*'s usual features, "Classic Books About Popular Fiction" and the "Bio-Biblical-Critical" books received, have been squeezed out of this special issue and will resume in *MILLION* number 6

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# Editorial

**MILLION** – meet *Interzone*. *Interzone* – meet **MILLION**. Actually, this one-issue-only experiment in fusing the two magazines is far from being an even merger, since what you hold in your hands is really an issue of **MILLION**: *The Magazine of Popular Fiction* with an *Interzone* wrap-round. The reasons we are doing it are as follows.

*Interzone* has almost 2,000 subscribers, while **MILLION** has just over 500. We calculate that the overlap between the two subscription lists is less than 100 strong. Also, *IZ* has (limited) newstrade distribution through the W.H. Smith and John Menzies news-chains, which the newer magazine does not yet enjoy. Therefore, we assume, the bulk of *Interzone*'s readers have not read **MILLION** – and they don't know what they've been missing. We very much hope that they'll enjoy this sample issue and consider subscribing.

Since *Interzone* is paying all the costs of this issue, the temporary merger also gives **MILLION** a much-needed financial

breathing space – no more typesetting and printing bills until October! Finally, since we have to produce only one magazine this month instead of two, Ann and I can afford the time for a short holiday (ten days in Scotland). Hence our description of this as a “special holiday issue” in the last issue of *Interzone*.

Seriously, we hope that there's plenty for both readerships to enjoy in this combined issue. As I say, it's essentially an issue of **MILLION**, though *Interzone* readers will find Nick Lowe, John Clute and other regular columnists doing their usual stints at the back of the magazine. Also we have endeavoured to slant the rest of the contents of the issue slightly towards the interests of science-fiction and fantasy readers – without, I hope, the risk of boring those **MILLION** readers who are generally averse to SF & F: a few reviews apart, there's nothing in this issue which would not normally appear in **MILLION**.

Some late notes: **Katherine Ramsland**,

who wrote the profile of Anne Rice herein, is the author of a forthcoming book on that writer – *Prism of the Night: A Biography of Anne Rice* (New American Library, November 1991). Another of our contributors, **Toby Young**, is about to launch his own quarterly magazine, *The Modern Review*. This too will deal in part with popular fiction, though from a rather different angle of approach than **MILLION** takes. We wish him the best of luck.

**Kim Newman**, who has written this issue's short story, has a big new novel, *Jago*, due out from Simon & Schuster in October: it may well prove to be his “breakthrough” book, and I urge anyone who has enjoyed Kim's work in these magazines to look out for it. And those particularly interested in **J.G. Ballard** should watch out for a 50-minute documentary about him which will be broadcast as part of BBC2 television's “Bookmark” series in a few weeks time – 18th September is the likely date.

(David Pringle)

## COMING IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF **MILLION**

- \* A delightful interview with Scottish historical novelist **Dorothy Dunnett**.
- \* Meet **E.V. Thompson**, bestselling saga writer; and **Douglas Reeman** (also known as Alexander Kent), author of seafaring adventures.
- \* A feature on **Thomas Harris**, author of *The Silence of the Lambs*; and pieces on yesterday's favourites **Ouida**, **Seamark** and **E. Charles Vivian**.
- \* The Simple Art of Melodrama, Crime versus Romance, and Robinson Crusoe's Descendants are all the subjects of lively articles.
- \* And much more: interviews, articles and reviews about all aspects of popular fiction...

### Also lined up for the near future are:

- \* Interviews with adventure-story writer **Hammond Innes**; crime novelists **Liza Cody**, **John Harvey**, **Reginald Hill** and **Sara Paretsky**; westerner **J.T. Edson**; humorist **Tom Holt** – and many, many others...
- \* Plus pieces on the **Mills & Boon** phenomenon; the world's most prolific writers; **Rafael Sabatini**, author of *Captain Blood*; **Frank Richards**, creator of Billy Bunter; the wonderful **Strand Magazine**; the adventure tales of “**Ganpat**”; the master of locked-room mysteries, **John Dickson Carr**; and a good deal more!

Watch out for the November-December issue, on sale in October 1991.



# Throwing People to Stories

Terry Pratchett, perhaps the best comic novelist now working, has some strange notions in his upcoming books – as **Brendan Wignall** discovers

Through the fathomless deeps of space swims the star turtle Great A'Tuin, bearing on its back the four giant elephants who carry on their shoulders the mass of the Discworld. A tiny sun and moon spin around them, on a complicated orbit to induce seasons, so probably nowhere else in the multiverse is it sometimes necessary for an elephant to cock a leg to allow the sun to go past.

Exactly why this should be may never be known. Possibly the Creator of the universe got bored with all the usual business of axial inclination, albedos and rotational velocities, and decided to have a bit of fun for once...

Magic glues the Discworld together – magic generated by the turning of the world itself, magic wound like silk out of the underlying structure of existence to suture the wounds of reality.

(Wyrd Sisters)

**T**he Discworld.

One can only wonder what Great A'Tuin thinks about as he swims the seas of space. Is he aware of what is going on on that tiny Disc with a circumference of only 10,000 miles? As Terry Pratchett remarks in *Pyramids*, "Much that is weird could happen on the back of a turtle like that."

Is it possible that Great A'Tuin is aware of the gods of the Discworld, cosily ensconced in their bijou home "Dunmanifestin"; of the Kingdom of Djelibeybi, two miles wide and one hundred and fifty miles long; of the Ramtops mountains where magic is thick and the witches Granny Weatherwax, Nanny Ogg and Magrat – the New Age witch – make their homes?

Does he know that he is carrying the great twin city of Ankh-Morpork upon his back: a city "of a hundred thousand souls... and ten times that number of actual people"; a city divided by the great river Ankh, a river so viscous it doesn't flow but oozes, although despite this the citizens are proud of it: "Ankh-Morpork's citizens had always claimed that the river water was incredibly pure in any case. Any water that had passed through so many kidneys, they reasoned, had to be very pure indeed."

The city is home to Unseen University, premier school of magic on the Disc, where the magician Rincewind has been "read" by one of the great spells and is therefore incapable of learning even the simplest magic; where the Librarian has been turned into an orangutan, but wishes to remain so, since it helps him to get around the shelves and reduces the philosophical problems of life to the level of wondering where his next banana is coming from.

Ankh-Morpork is ruled by a Patrician who has licensed

the Thieves' Guild, making it responsible for theft, so that only an acceptable level of crime – controlled by a rigid system of quotas and receipts – is permitted; where the wealthy may arrange to be mugged in the comfort of their own homes and so get the business out of the way at the beginning of the year; a city patrolled by the four-strong Night Watch and visited at various times by The Luggage – a loyal but psychopathic wooden chest on legs which eats people *and* magically cleans clothes; Cohen the Barbarian, famous hero who is a lifetime in his own legend and a martyr to his back; and Death, who likes cats.

Is it possible that Great A'Tuin is aware of what he carries? Who knows? Perhaps one day we will find out.

**T**erry Pratchett had his first short story published in the Sixties in *Science Fantasy* magazine while he was still at school. His first novel was a fantasy for children, *The Carpet People*, published in 1971. This was followed by *The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976), a space-opera comedy, and *Strata* (1981), another comic space opera which concerns itself with the search for a mysterious flat world, which is eventually found complete with tiny orbiting sun – just like the Discworld of his later fiction. This world is, it seems, some sort of cosmic joke, so it is not just its shape that it shares with its literary descendant.

*The Colour of Magic* (1983) is the first of the *Discworld* novels and it is with this series that Pratchett has made of himself something far more significant than a science-fiction and fantasy parodist: taken as a whole the *Discworld* series is the best sustained body of humorous writing in the 20th century.

Comparisons with other humorists tend to miss the point. The cover blurb for *The Colour of Magic* mentions Jerome K. Jerome and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*. Although there are superficial similarities between Pratchett and Douglas Adams (principally, or perhaps solely, that they both work against a background of science fiction or fantasy) the differences are considerable. Both are undoubtedly funny, but there is a quality of engagement with character in Pratchett's writing which Adams isn't even particularly interested in achieving. The comparison with Jerome is in some ways more relevant, but unlike Adams and Pratchett he was limited by his realist context.

Comparisons with other 20th-century humorists also serve principally to show what Pratchett is not. He lacks the (admittedly engaging) vacuity of P.G. Wodehouse,



and the savagery of Evelyn Waugh or Tom Sharpe is completely alien to him. Indeed a notable feature of his writing is that even at his most parodic – and his later books are not primarily parodies – the parody is gentle and good-natured.

He is sufficiently different from those who have gone before him to cause problems for reviewers and publicists alike who wish to pigeonhole him by comparison with other writers or by the use of certain trigger words. One can only sympathize with his note in the dedication of *Equal Rites*:

I would like it to be clearly understood that this book is not wacky. Only dumb redheads in Fifties' sitcoms are wacky.

No it's not zany, either.

His biographical details are presented humorously and then sketchily in the paperback copies of his books and suggest a pleasingly normal life. Is there really nothing more to be said than that he chose journalism as a career because "it was indoor work with no heavy lifting," and grows carnivorous plants as a hobby?

"I left school when I was seventeen to get a job on the local paper in Buckinghamshire, and between then and 1980 I did almost every job that it was possible to do in provincial journalism: I've done the women's page and the children's corner, I've subbed sport – never reported sport, but even vultures will throw up at something. If I really had to I could bring out a newspaper, I know how to do it.

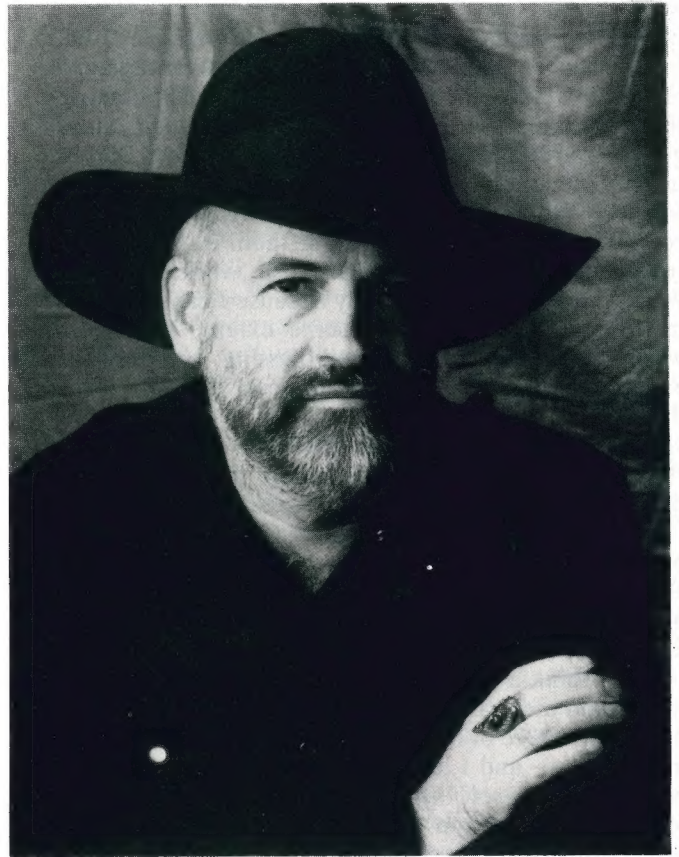
"That's it really: I once said that people like the Society of Authors should have a special course you could go on to give you impressive jobs which you could talk about later on – for a fortnight you could have two-day slots of working on a tramp steamer and so on, and after the fortnight you could say you'd done all these things. But that's it, it's primarily journalism."

In 1980 Pratchett left journalism to work for the Central Electricity Generating Board.

"I left my job with the Bath *Chronicle* Group not because I didn't like it, but because I suddenly realized that if I didn't make the break I could programme my life all the way up to the golden handshake. Initially the job with the CEGB was a lot of the arranging of words into certain significant patterns; I drifted there in a fairly gentle kind of way, and then as the whole PR side of the industry grew – because of the nuclear component and the growing awareness that there was a power generating industry – I seemed to go along with it. I didn't start immediately as press officer; I got that job a couple of years after I started there and stayed with it until 1987."

A number of readers have assumed that because he worked for a hi-tech concern like the CEGB he must have some scientific background which would explain the "scientific" concerns of his early novels, *Strata* and *The Dark Side of the Sun*.

"I saw one review which had me as a physicist. I think there's a certain amount of confusion in that I have worked for an industry in which physicists are employed, and it may be that I've gained some 'contact' qualifications by working there, but I have absolutely no scientific background whatsoever. We take *New Scientist* and I try to keep abreast of things; if you ask yourself 'What is news?' you find that basically on the whole what most politicians say isn't news, but about half the stuff which turns up in *New Scientist* is news."



Terry Pratchett

**H**ow easily did Pratchett make the transition from salaried employee to full-time writer?

"I left work in the autumn of 1987 just before the *Mort* paperback tour. Basically what happened was that I signed a big contract with Corgi and Gollancz which I knew for a certainty was going to give me at least five years' reliable income. There's no conceivable reason why anyone in their right mind would keep on the day job. If it were just writing, purely writing, then it could be done. Unfortunately the whole authoring business has so many other aspects to it that you actually have to do it full-time."

While Pratchett's output grew throughout the late Eighties the last two years have seen an enormous increase in his output (publications in 1989 and 1990: *Pyramids*, *The Unadulterated Cat*, *Guards! Guards!*, *Good Omens* (with Neil Gaiman), *Truckers*, *Diggers*, *Wings*, *Eric* and *Moving Pictures*). Is this anything to do with publishers' lead times and his becoming a full-time writer in 1987, or has it more to do with his well-known enthusiasm for computers?

"Well if you add the cat book (*The Unadulterated Cat*) and the three children's books (*Truckers*, *Diggers* and *Wings*) which were quite short it looks a lot, but that's principally due to a concatenation of publishing dates.

"As regards computers, the two things coincided: I started to use the Amstrad 464, the first of Alan Sugar's Amstrads, a games machine in, I think, 1984 when it first came out. I suppose it is true that the growth of Terry Pratchett writer paralleled the gradual growth of wordprocessing, but I can't necessarily say that there's any sort of cause and effect; when I wanted to do the stuff



there was machinery available to do it on. I just couldn't work the way I work now if I was winding bits of paper into a typewriter: it just would not be possible. I hate bits of paper. I don't work in chapters or in segments, and there's just something very comforting about having this huge lump of text which is the story, which you can go backwards and forwards in. It's not so much that I'm heavily into computers but that I'm into wordprocessing in a big way. You know, it's the old gag: I don't love computers, I just say that to get them into bed. They represent the means by which I can work. Because I work quite a lot, and basically because I can afford it, I indulge myself in them to some extent, but I think wordprocessing can be a mixed blessing; you only have to look at the size of some American books to realize that."

Although recent years have been the most productive Pratchett has been writing for some time and sold his first attempt at a short story to a magazine in the sixties.

"Oh yes, it was the classic thing: I sold my first story when I was thirteen and all that sort of stuff. But all this is really so much marsh gas because there was never any plan of action, any kind of gentle escalation. Until *The Colour of Magic* came out, occasionally I'd write a book; I didn't think a great deal about it and years would go by without me really thinking about writing. I'm a great believer in force of habit – I think you can turn anything into a habit – and I turned writing into a habit. Over a period I got myself into that frame of mind where you feel that if you're not writing you're wasting time. I'm just coming out of that now. Now I believe that if you're not writing you're *possibly* wasting time."

**W**hen asked once if he was the stand-up comic who yearned to play Hamlet, Pratchett replied: "No, I'm the stand-up comic who yearns to play Las Vegas." How serious is he about his work?

"Never confuse a quick glib answer with the truth. There are things that it's possible to do. I think if I ever stood up and declared that I had some really serious points that I wanted to get across in a *Discworld* book, I might as well just dig a hole in the ground and drag the shovel in after me. There are some things which I can do within the *Discworld* sequence. I came fairly close to doing some of the things I wanted to in *Guards! Guards!* for example.

"I'm working on an untitled novel about the *Discworld* religions; the basic idea works very well. Somewhere on the *Discworld* there's this huge monolithic religion, one of the 'big beard in the sky' types. About every five hundred years a prophet turns up, and generally he – and it's always a he – comes out of the desert having spoken to the god, and his sayings and so forth change the course of the church. It's very clear what happens: basically every five hundred years the church in effect selects the guy – after all, you don't want to leave anything to chance. And it just so happens on this occasion that the god, for the first time in any real sense, actually has spoken to a member of the church only he isn't the guy who is going to be the prophet. There's lots of fun involved; he's a lowly kind of priest who doesn't want this god talking to him the whole time. I came down on certain things about religions and about gods, but hopefully I can do it in a reasonably funny way.

"Lots of things happen to Brutha, the lowly priest,

who is a very serious lad; the difficulty is that the way the church has gone for the last four thousand years has got really nothing to do with anything the god has ever actually said. But now the official prophet and Brutha are trying to get different kinds of message across. I can parallel lots of things that happened in the Reformation: it tends to be the case in any church that whenever the arrival of a prophet is imminent people tend to busy themselves about what they consider to be the church's business, which usually consists of setting fire to people.

"The problem is that quite often this is exactly what the god does require. I think we let gods get away with too many things. People say, 'Oh well, it's a shame that the church does this, this and this, but whatever god is involved can't be held responsible for the actions of his followers.' Well, I think he bloody well can. Good grief, I don't see why we shouldn't apply to gods exactly the same things that we apply to human beings. If politicians are held responsible for what their followers do, I don't see why gods can't be.

"These are the kind of things which it is possible to examine. Similarly I look at how belief can almost create the object in which it believes. You need a few thousand years of believing in a god and whether or not that god existed at the start he certainly exists by then, simply as something distilled out of belief."

**A**s has already been noted, Pratchett is doing things in humorous fiction which no other writer has attempted; how far does he think this difference is due to his setting of the *Discworld*?

"The nice thing about fantasy is that you can examine this kind of thing. It gives you a tool kit which enables you to do this sort of examination. Only in fantasy can you really examine that kind of idea. For example in *Witches Abroad*, the one that's coming out this autumn, I've come up with the idea of narrative causality: stories could be thought of as almost sentient things in their own right. Within the chaos of history there are certain patterns of events which repeat themselves again and again. There are some myths which are common to all cultures; why is this? In *Witches Abroad* the conceit is that this is because they actually have an independent existence, they are bits of shaped history, in the same way that if water runs down a hill eventually it will carve a channel, and all other water that runs down that hill will find it easier to follow the channel and the channel will get bigger. Therefore if you're in the right place at the right time, to be there when a story starts you are forced to tread the path of the story. I use various analogies in the book, but they're almost a predatory lifeform because human beings are forced again and again to do the same thing. You only need to look at the myths to see how this happens. If you see any story where the king has three sons and the first two brothers have gone out to seek their fortunes and not returned, you *know* that the third son is going to go out and succeed, because that's what the fairy tales tell you. It's impossible to conceive of the fact that he wouldn't because that's the shape of the story.

"I'm being quite heavy about this, but in *Witches Abroad* I go into some detail with the idea: I have a character – as close to a baddy as I can ever get – who actually gets power from throwing people to stories, seeing that stories happen. Unfortunately they happen to real people.



"This gives me the opportunity for retelling the *Cinderella* myth as if it were real and as if real people were involved, because unfortunately the problem with *Cinderella* is that it's only delightful as a story if all the people involved are tailors' dummies with no emotional lives of their own. As soon as you start thinking about real people being involved in a fairy tale context these are all horror stories.

"The three witches from *Wyrd Sisters* are tracking this character who throws people to stories, by following the stories across the country. They come across Red Riding Hood, and there's an examination of *Little Red Riding Hood* as a real story: the only person who comes out of it with any kind of honour is the big bad wolf.

"I also look at things like the tendency to replace action with desire: it's easier to wish than to work. The character who throws people to stories does it because she likes happy endings; she's a great believer in them regardless of whether or not the people involved actually want happy endings. Granny Weatherwax speaks at length about the impossibility of creating happy endings; the impossibility of using any kind of magic to make life better for people.

"I have to say that I've talked about this seriously, but this is just the framework to enable me to get these three baggages around the place in a moderately pleasant way. I hope it's the plot that's driving the story. I can invent narrative causality which has a certain resonance with morphic resonance and I can then get on with the plot. But within fantasy you can actually do such a thing, and you can't really do anything like that in any other field.'

**F**ive of the nine books published in 1989 and 1990 were non-Discworld. Is this a sign that he feels limited by Discworld?

"Anything has limits and I'm happy to work within the limits of Discworld. Sometimes I feel limited by people's expectations. I've never quite got to the bottom of this, but the question I often get asked is, when is

### Terry Pratchett Bibliography

*The Carpet People* (1971)  
*The Dark Side of the Sun* (1976)  
*Strata* (1981)  
*The Colour of Magic*\* (1983)  
*The Light Fantastic*\* (1986)  
*Equal Rites*\* (1987)  
*Mort*\* (1987)  
*Sourcery*\* (1988)  
*Wyrd Sisters*\* (1988)  
*Pyramids*\* (1989)  
*The Unadulterated Cat* (1989)  
*Guards! Guards!*\* (1989)  
*Truckers* (1989)  
*Good Omens* (with Neil Gaiman, 1990)  
*Diggers* (1990)  
*Eric*\* (1990)  
*Wings* (1990)  
*Moving Pictures*\* (1990)  
*Reaper Man*\* (1991)  
*Witches Abroad*\* (1991)

\*Discworld novels

Rincewind coming back? If I say to people, what's your favourite book, then usually it's either *Mort* or increasingly these days it's *Guards! Guards!* I think Rincewind has about a page and a half in *Mort* and he doesn't appear in *Guards! Guards!*; so there's no correlation. I've got nothing against Rincewind as a character, he's dead useful in his own way, and he will be coming back; but I don't actually feel called upon to produce books with him in. People seem to like the books which haven't got him in, and I get slightly bothered; I think: 'Hang on, if I'd listened to all this when-is-Rincewind-coming-back stuff when I started out there'd have been about nine or ten books about Rincewind, it'd be like some kind of American series.' I'd never have written *Mort* or *Guards! Guards!* or *Moving Pictures* or any of those.

"There are certain things which have to appear in a *Discworld* book simply to make it a *Discworld* book, and I don't just mean the physical things, but if you listen to fans you can – if you're too impressionable – end up writing what they want, which isn't necessarily what the readers want and isn't what you want. That's the only limitation I suppose and I don't have to take any notice of it anyway.

"There is no shortage of anything to write; I like doing *Discworld* books, the publishers like publishing them, the readers like buying them; so it seems a bit stupid to consider stopping. It would be wrong to say that no effort is involved – a lot of effort is involved – but it's not painful, I'm not doing anything I don't want to do."

**T**here has been a steady development in the *Discworld* books: *The Colour of Magic* and *The Light Fantastic* provide an introduction to the *Discworld*, but unlike the later novels they have more in common with traditionally-conceived fantasy, and are principally parodies of their source material.

"Parody is the wrong kind of word, for say, *Guards! Guards!* They're not parodies in there but resonances, I think. If you write something akin to a police procedural novel it resonates. It has to. There's no way you can avoid it happening. So all you have to do at times is simply tell people that that's exactly what does happen. In the same way that I'm doing the *Discworld* religions one, it has to resonate with lots of things which have been going on in the last few years, lots of things that people know about the Christian religion and Mohammedism and things like that. There is no way you can avoid that so you have to take it on board.

"An example of resonance in *Guards! Guards!* is Lady Sybil Ramkin (a breeder of miniature dragons, who sports a 'whinny if you love dragons' sticker on the back of her carriage and is a great supporter of 'The Sunshine Sanctuary for Sick Dragons'): anyone who has ever kept any kind of animals which require showing knows where she's coming from. There's no parody as such; you could slot her in anywhere. She's a certain type and that type exists in vast numbers in the world, everyone can recognize her.

"On the other hand, a gag that no-one's ever said they've got is the Patrician's name, Lord Vetinari. I always think of the Patrician as a vaguely Florentine prince, a sort of Machiavelli and Robespierre rolled into one. And of course it was the Medici. So I thought if you had the Medici then you would have the Dentistri and the Vetinari. The *Discworld* is full of things which don't look like gags but are gags if only you can work



out what the intervening step is which I haven't given.

"I think in a few years' time *Guards! Guards!* will be at least as popular as, if not more popular than *Mort*, which up to now in terms of fan mail and things, has appeared the most popular."

One element of the development of tone within the *Discworld* novels has been a growing sense of something akin to wistfulness. *Guards! Guards!* closes with two dragons flying over the edge of the Discworld away into space:

On the far edge of the Disc the sun was rising. The light of the morning began to flow across the patchwork of seas and continents, but it did so slowly, because light is tardy and slightly heavy in the presence of a magical field.

On the dark crescent, where the old light of sunset had barely drained from the deepest valleys, two specks, one big, one small, flew out of the shadow, skimmed low across the swells of the Rim ocean, and struck out determinedly over the totally unfathomable, star-dotted depths of space.

Perhaps the magic would last. Perhaps it wouldn't. But then, what does?

A similar quality can be found at the end of *Moving Pictures* when Gaspode the Wonder Dog loses his faculties, reverts to normal doghood and the colour drains out of his world as he limps off into the monochrome sunset.

"If you take on board the fact that from about the age of 13 to 15 I was incredibly impressed by G.K. Chesterton, you may see one of the motors that drive some of the aspects of the *Discworld* books.

"For example, how much of a gag is this? In *Reaper Man* (the most recent *Discworld* novel), Death is going to die – a certain usurpation has taken place – and he has got two months of life which is a kind of gift to him like a retirement present before he dies. And it's about what he does in that time, and what he learns about human beings and certain decisions that he makes – one of which is that he does not want to die. That works extremely well as a plot. The interesting bit was then doing the *coda*, where – because it's *Discworld* – he survives, he overcomes the threat and he's back at being the Death we know and love, but now knows things; he hasn't got feelings but he remembers the feelings that he had, because for a period he was close to being a human being. He then has to deal with these facts.

"Now there doesn't appear to be a single comic element that you can possibly get out of this, but it's actually possible to find comedy in unlikely places.

"I'm less afraid now than I used to be about putting serious things in, mainly because you have to have them. The problem with some American fantasy writers is that they're either too keen on listening to the elves singing and looking at the unicorns, or they go for unrelieved humour: the whole thing is completely gag-driven from first to last. Something Americans have grasped far less readily than Europeans – and it may even be that Americans as writers actually can't grasp it – is the fact that although dragons may explode sometimes and crap all down your back and are a nuisance, that doesn't make them any less magical or interesting: it makes them more magical and interesting because it gives an extra dimension to them. Similarly the fact that Ankh-Morpork is a knee-deep in slurry half the time doesn't make it any less a fantasy city."

Pratchett began his career as a writer quite clearly within the categories of fantasy and science fiction, but as he has progressed he appears to have left both some way behind.

"I read a fair amount of fantasy, enough to know what's going on in the field, because I'd be remarkably stupid not to do that; but I don't actually look upon it as the field in which I operate. For one thing – and this can sound remarkably crude so I have to be careful about it – I sell a large number of books; they must be selling to people other than straight fantasy fans, and I'd better keep that in my mind. That is why the *Discworld* has broadened out a bit. With *Moving Pictures* the film industry is common to everybody; fairy tales are common to everybody; with *Wyrd Sisters* everyone knows *Macbeth* even if they've never read or seen it. So I've expanded away from the normal concerns of fantasy.

"The other difficulty I have with 'fantasy' is that it has tended to come to mean the consensus fantasy universe; I'm astonished at how many books still get churned out in that vein: the wizards, the dragons, the swords, the heroes – it seems the same myths can be retold again and again. Clearly that has to happen and it works because these things are so powerful, but there's got to be more to fantasy than those sort of things.

"Eighty or ninety years ago 'fantasy' would include *The Time Machine* and all the other things which would be thought to be in exactly the same kind of category. They wouldn't be judged fantasy because they had wizards, swords or dragons in them: it would be down to a particular way of looking at the universe. Now, because of the way books get put on shelves fantasy has come to mean something very specific.

"I suppose you can 'blame' Tolkien: *Lord of the Rings* was so powerful it set an image. Let's face it, how did things happen? Well, lots of people read *Lord of the Rings* as their first introduction to fantasy; then there's this brief period where you go and dig up lots of Icelandic folk tales and find that they really are dull and boring; you read *Njal's Saga* or something and think 'cor, bloody hell!', because it isn't what you think, though when you get a bit older you realize that sort of thing has other aspects which you didn't particularly notice – there's a bit in *Guards! Guards!* where *Beowulf* is very fleetingly alluded to when one of the heroes is saying, 'only the other day some bloke killed this monster and his mum came and complained.' Then you go and read Lord Dunsany and stuff like that, but you find that nothing quite compares to that first brilliant flare from Tolkien. Unfortunately you're given a mind-set, but there are other things out there – not that I'm knocking Tolkien.

"I've done a story for an American Tolkien centenary anthology and it's basically the meeting up of an ancient troll and an ancient barbarian hero – and you can guess where I'm coming from, it's the old gunfighter meeting the old sheriff – and they realize they've fought, and what the hell? 'We've fought each other, we got nothing out of it except scars, and the hobbits have filled the wilderness from one side to the other with farms. I fought for the king and no-one even told me what his name was...' And so you can actually get this out of the classic things, you can find new directions to go."

If Pratchett is no longer a fantasy writer – and clearly it makes more sense to see him as primarily a humorist – which writers have influenced him from that tradition?

"I read recently that 'comedy' comes from a Greek



term meaning 'going round the villages,' i.e. these were the actors that weren't allowed in the cities: every time I load up the car because I'm going off to Colchester or Hounslow or somewhere to give a talk I think of that.

"I get nervous with this sort of question: too much introspection is bad for you. I was extremely fortunate in that when I learned that reading was really a fun thing to do there was a second-hand bookshop a few miles away that I could bike over to once or twice a week. I don't know if it had all the comic writers of the 20th century, but it had quite a good comic section, and I just read my way through it. I didn't know what was good or bad. I read lots and lots of stuff that people won't have heard of any more, lots and lots of stuff that would now be thought of as classic: *Jennings*, Sellar and Yeatman, H.F. Ellis, all the *Beachcomber* books... they just got read; anything vaguely interesting got read.

"So all I can say is I read a lot. Beyond that I suppose the biggest influence is actually just being alive and warm for  $x$  number of years. It's hard to say whether the job gives you this or whether you bring it to the job, but journalism is something where you can hover around taking it all in, and after a little while you write it all down again.

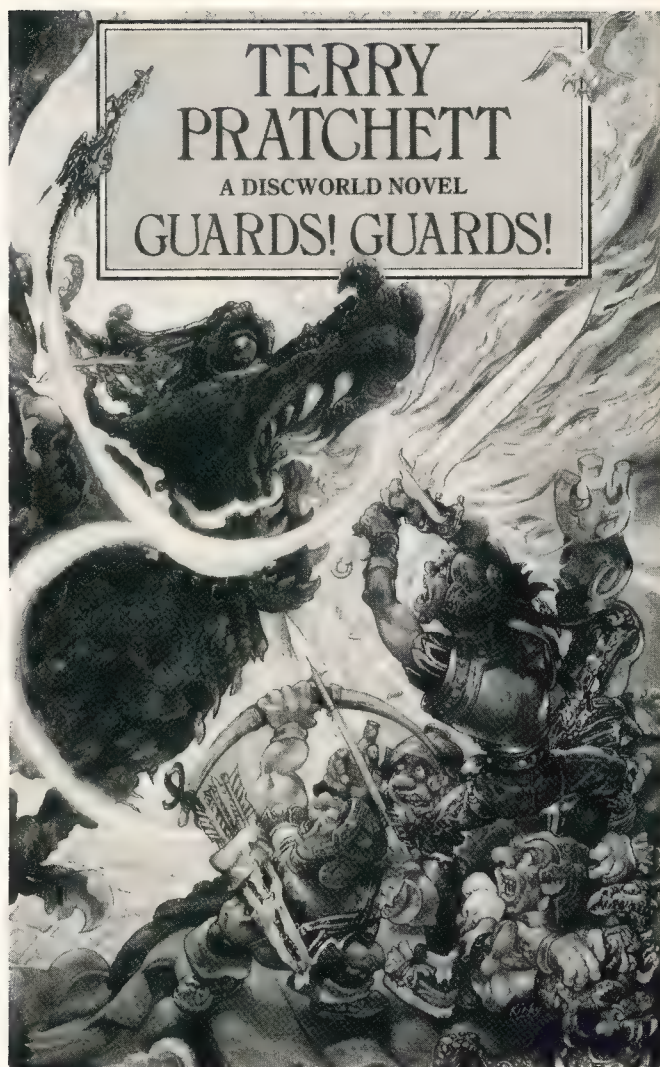
"I've already mentioned Chesterton. He lived in the same town as I did when I was young – not at the same time, I hasten to add, he died in 1936 – but I think that's initially why I took an interest in him; there are various places named after him and so forth. It's worth pointing out that in *The Man Who Was Thursday* and *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* he gave us two of the most emotionally charged plots in the 20th century: one being that both sides are actually the same side; it doesn't matter which sides we're talking out, both sides are the same. This has been the motor of half the spy novels of this century. The other plot can't be summarized so succinctly, but the basic plot of *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* is that someone takes seriously an idea that wasn't intended to be taken seriously and gives it some kind of nobility by so doing. He was a good sunsets man, G.K. Chesterton: when it came to sunsets no-one could describe one better than him – he just used to spill a paint box on the page and that was it. If you read lots and lots of Chesterton after a while it becomes extremely tedious, but in small doses taken regularly he's good for the soul."

**T**he most recent *Discworld* novel, published in May, was *Reaper Man*, to be followed by *Witches Abroad* in the autumn. How does Pratchett see the future shaping up?

"I had a bad period in January and February when I'd finished a book and hadn't started the next one, and I had about three or four ideas of what I wanted to do. I must have written about 100,000 words on various starts of things and then I realized that what I really wanted to do was the *Discworld* religions story that I'd put at the back of my mind saying to myself that I'd do that as the next one; but I realized that I'd have to get that one written."

I suggest that like Detroit in Loren Estleman's *Amos Walker* stories, Ankh-Morpork is one of the unsung heroes of the *Discworld* books.

"I'm fighting shy about setting another novel in Ankh-Morpork because it's too easy to do Ankh-Morpork. One of the books that has gone into abeyance is about



Ankh-Morpork's first newspaper; I had to tread particularly carefully so that I wasn't doing *Moving Pictures* all over again. It's gone into abeyance not because of any similarity to *Moving Pictures* but because it needs the yeast."

There have been rumours that there is to be a sequel to his collaborative novel with Neil Gaiman, *Good Omens* which takes as its starting point the idea central to *The Omen*, where the devil's child is exchanged for the child of a US senator; unfortunately due to a mix-up Mr and Mrs Average of Tadfield, West Midlands, get the son of Satan by mistake.

"Oh yes, 664: *The Neighbour of the Beast*. I doubt whether that will ever be written. Curiously enough while I don't think *Good Omens* cries out for a sequel, there is a sequel built into the very plot premise of it. However, it's looking likely that there's going to be a film. You're never certain until such time as you're sitting there on the first night and even then it might not happen, but we have a treatment which will work; we had to Americanize it to some extent but nothing like as much as we feared we might have to.

"*Mort* is looking quite a good prospect as a film. The current plan is that where the *Discworld* is involved it will appear as a given: the world when seen from space is on the back of a turtle and people either know what it is or it's just a fantasy image. *Mort* is a story which stands alone: it doesn't have to be set anywhere in particular – it could be set in 16th-century Germany quite happily.

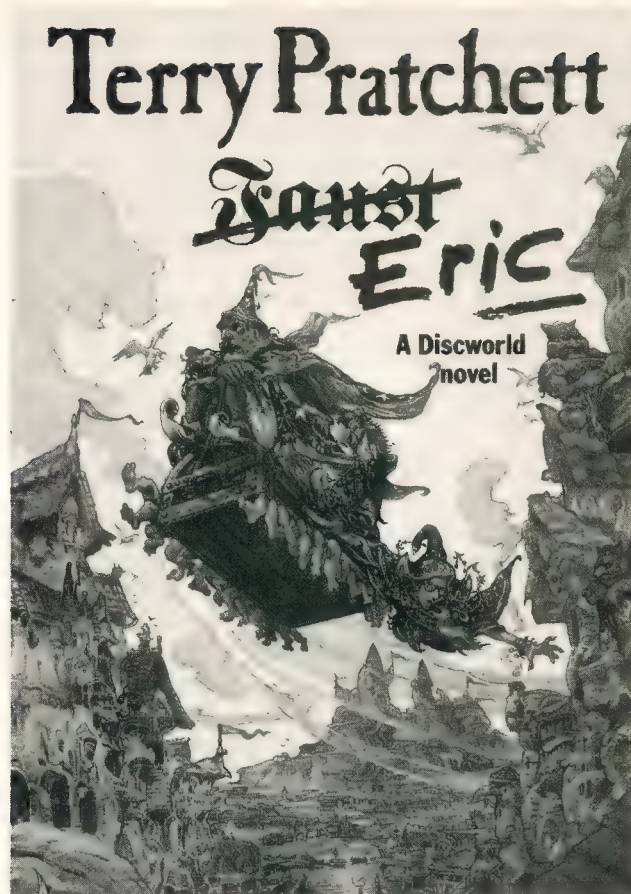


"*Mort* is more advanced as a film in that I've been paid for a draft of the script, but it's now going through that long dark tunnel known as development hell. *Good Omens* hasn't gone that far, but I wouldn't be at all surprised if it overtakes *Mort*. It won't be a huge surprise if they both make it through to production; it would be a disappointment if neither of them did. I think one of them ought to struggle on."

**P**erhaps what Great A'Tuin knows of the Discworld will always remain hidden; we should simply be glad that he looks as though he will be continuing his journey through space for some time to come, and look forward to more of Pratchett's particularly uplifting comedies. To say of such a best-selling author that he is remarkably under-rated seems perverse, but that is exactly what should be said of Pratchett: with his blend of fantasy and humour he has taken the comic novel into entirely new territory, giving it a range of reflection and compassion which is wonderful and unique.

I won't say that he gets better with every book, because he can't: I don't believe that there *could* be a better comedy than *Guards! Guards!*, for example, but I relish the prospect of reading Pratchett's efforts to improve upon it; long may they continue.

*Terry Pratchett's books are published in hardcover by Gollancz and in paperback by Corgi. Witches Abroad is forthcoming this November.*



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## SLIGHTLY FOXED

A column by  
**David Langford**

# Ancient Images

Years ago at an SF writers' conference, a visiting American invited the massed authors to embarrass themselves. "I want you to cast your minds back," he said hypnotically, "to the very first image from literature that you can remember." This would apparently be Significant, though where the Significance lay was – and remained – unclear.

Around the circle, people started nervously responding with lofty scenes from noted works. It was like a job interview conducted by some company that had fallen for graphology, with candidates struggling to produce handwriting which clearly indicated uprightness, perseverance, loyalty, discreet ambition and absolutely no tendency to fall about in hysterical laughter at the idea of taking this test seriously. When it came to me, I felt it practically my duty to lower the tone with coarse honesty. Unfortunately I couldn't remember a decent flagellation scene from Billy Bunter, or anything beyond the title of the controversial (in my family, anyway) comic book *Goom: The Thing from Planet X*. Instead it would have to be...

No, not *that*!

In the event I did a brief rhapsody about *Biggles Hits The Trail* by Captain W.E. Johns, one of the ace pilot's rare excursions in the direction of SF. The plot was centred on a lost Tibetan mountain made mostly of radium. Inevitably this feature of the landscape was honey-combed with the dwellings of countless mad monks, who had harnessed the awesome force of radioactivity to their sinister ends.

For example, they used it to generate an innovative sort of static electricity that glued unwanted visitors' feet to the ground (much later I realized this was a pinch from Kipling's 1912 SF story "As Easy as A.B.C."). Some of my best schoolday nightmares involved the scene where Biggles and intrepid companions are pinned, just barely able to drag their feet in a crackle of sparks, while the monks' favourite pets advance fluidly on them – an inexhaustible stream of albino electric centipedes with enormous fangs.

But the image that remained was simply that of the brooding "Mountain of

Light" itself, glowing fitfully amid the Himalayas. Good picture. Lousy physics, but a good picture.

The keen-eyed reader may have noticed a slight hesitation above. What, when Billy Bunter and even *Goom: The Thing from Planet X* were toyed with, was too embarrassing to relate? Confessional time: the answer is Enid Blyton, and the remembered scene was simply a loft full of apples, some of them rotten. Later I confided this to other writers, and one or two did say, shiftily, "Oh yes, I remember *that*."

This column's usual bibliographical rigour is being abandoned, as I can no longer place the short story involved. (A largish Blyton omnibus, illustrated? Please don't anyone sully the delicate bloom of my ignorance.)

Blyton was a highly visual writer, and that piece sticks in the mind as a thoroughly and even maddeningly memorable use of an image for didactic purposes. The context: some kids are helping an older female relative, no doubt an aunt, to store apples in the loft for winter. Only perfect, unbruised apples need apply. Of course one of the children bungles and admits one apple with the tiniest possible bruise.

The curtain is lowered to indicate some lapse of time, and rises on a scene of moral horror. Sadly the aunt shows the kids what has come to pass, with the flawed apple now a seething mound of corruption, spreading rot to dozens of others around it. The tableau had a suppurating intensity that H.P. Lovecraft would have been hard put to match. Unforgettable.

But perhaps I'd have forgotten Biggles's Mountain of Light without the underpinning horror of that slow-motion, dream-clogged flight from multi-legged peril, and perhaps the apple scene would slide quite easily from memory without its dreadful ensuing moral.

The point of Blyton's story was that between the two visits to the loft, the kids have been wanting a school friend to come and stay. A *naughty* one with a *bad reputation*, it's admitted, but they

promise to set him a good example and reform him out of recognition. Sadly but kindly the aunt discloses the scene of fruity necrosis and pronounces her awful judgement. The bad always corrupts the good. That acquaintance might have only a tiny bruise of naughtiness on his soul now; but if you good kids associate with him, *this* will be the grim result. Shades of the prison-house...

One doesn't want to make too much of one brief story in Enid Blyton's colossal output. Elsewhere she has plenty of effective if not particularly memorable imagery: a quarter-century since I last looked at them, the Famous Five books conjure up a jolly montage of mildly exciting things like caves, darkness, lonely houses, secret passages, midnight feasts and conclaves...

But those blasted apples refuse to be forgotten because, I rather believe, that was the first time I'd ever resented a piece of writing as being both effective and unfair. Come to think of it, there were plenty of little bruises on my youthful soul, and Blyton was evidently condemning me to total running-sore status by about the age of fifteen. No appeal allowed. You can't argue when someone else has craftily picked the analogy beforehand, especially when it might contain a smidgeon of truth. (I've never investigated whether this particular sentence of damnation was one reason why librarians later took against Blyton.)

Inoculation confers immunity, at least a bit and at least sometimes. My own favourite great-aunt, who never stored apples and who did me a huge favour at age twelve by giving me the old Methuen *G.K. Chesterton Omnibus*, later took an interest in my mildly rotted soul and tried me on some pop-theology by C.S. Lewis. It was all there: deviously chosen analogies, plausible wheedling, yawning logical gaps. The Blyton blight once again. If that was what Christianity was all about, I wanted no part of it.

Although I've never encountered the awesome sight of a radium mountain burningly gently in the twilight, any old rotten apple can still make me wince.



# Into the Mainstream?

J.G. Ballard made his first reputation as a talented and wayward writer of science fiction, but it was his semi-autobiographical war novel *Empire of the Sun* which transformed him into a true bestseller. **Richard Kadrey** and **David Pringle** spoke to him about his move to the “mainstream” of fiction, his involvement with the film world, and other matters – and we bring their conversation to you on the eve of publication of Ballard’s major new autobiographical novel *The Kindness of Women*

**S**itting in the coffee shop of the St Francis Hotel in San Francisco, J.G. Ballard does not bear any resemblance to the burned-out, alienated characters who often people his novels. On the contrary, he is animated and friendly, and, dressed in his tweed jacket and green polka-dot tie, seems more like your eccentric uncle than one of the most startling and controversial writers of the last few decades.

His first novel, *The Wind from Nowhere* (1962), was knocked out while on a family vacation in order to get enough money to free him from his straight job. It was followed by *The Drowned World* (1962), which won much praise in his native England, and by many collections of brilliant short stories. When his wife died, he raised his three children by himself, driving them to school and picking them up every day. This during a period when he was writing some of his most outrageous books, including *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) and *Crash* (1973), explorations of media fixation, automobile crashes and sex.

His best-selling autobiographical novel *Empire of the Sun* (1984), and the subsequent movie by Steven Spielberg, brought Ballard worldwide fame. His next book, *The Day of Creation* (1987), was not science fiction but what he simply calls an “imaginative novel.” It is the story of Dr Mallory and the river he accidentally creates in a drought-stricken country in Central Africa. Mallory dreams of the river becoming a third Nile that will one day irrigate the whole Sahara. But while he dreams, others impose their own dreams on the river, including a hack TV documentarian who believes that a film about Mallory will save his career, and a police commander who dreams of leading a secessionist government.

**Kadrey:** In England you’re regarded as something of a recluse. Has your first trip to the U.S. and your first major author’s tour been hard on you?

**Ballard:** It’s been tremendously successful. It’s pretty exhausting, of course. I mean, it’s a foreign country for me, but Americans are friendly and hospitable and everyone on the trip has done everything possible to make it a success. There hasn’t been a single hitch the whole time. Airplanes have actually arrived early and baggage has always appeared on the carousel. The inter-

## Editor’s Note

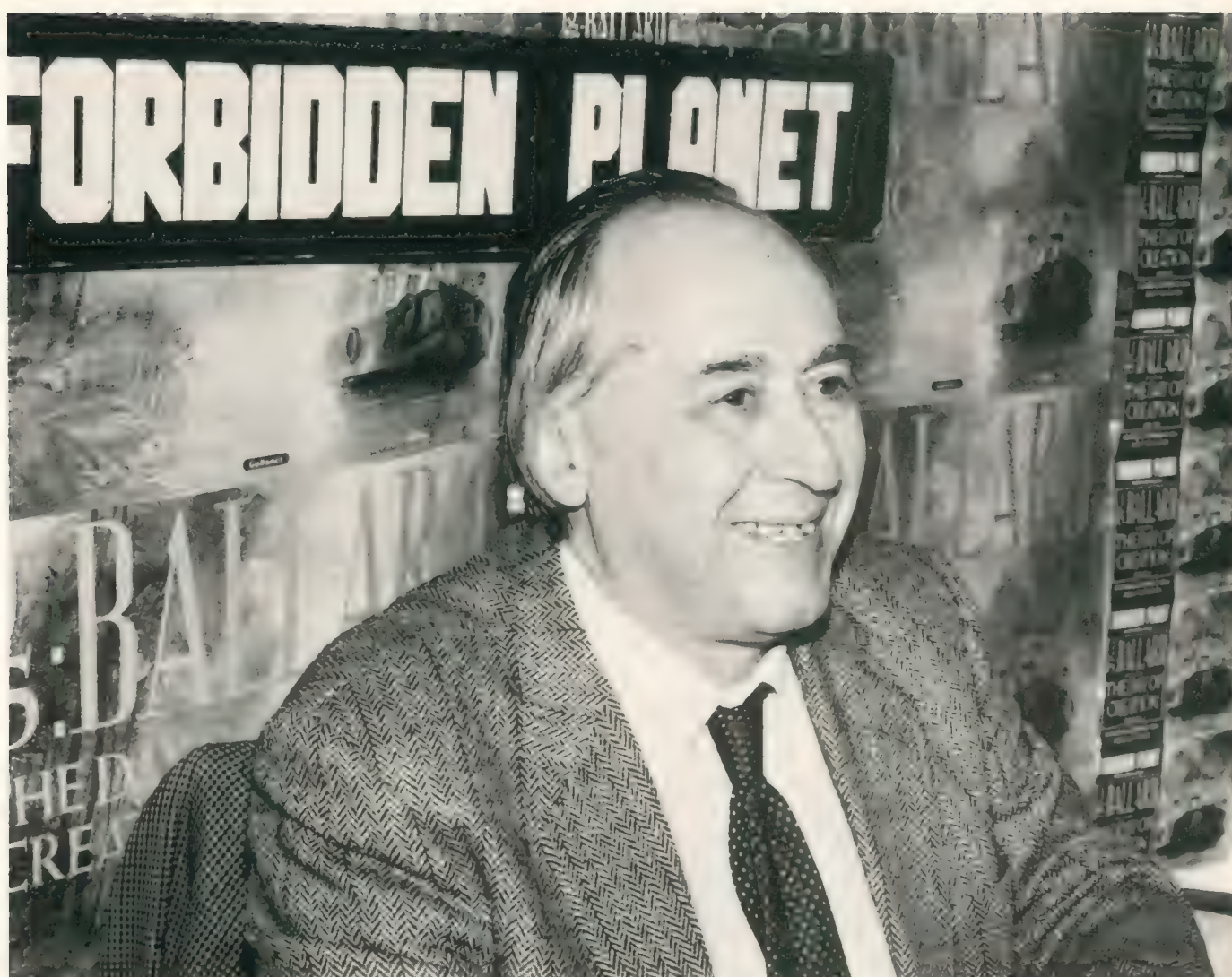
This interview was conducted in two parts, some time ago. Richard Kadrey, who had been commissioned by a glossy magazine of wide circulation, spoke to J.G. Ballard in May 1988, while the author was on a promotional tour of the United States. The magazine then asked for some supplementary material, and so David Pringle was despatched to Ballard’s home in Shepperton, Middlesex, on 14th November 1988 – the day before the writer’s 58th birthday. The combined interview was accepted, but for some reason unknown to the interviewers it was “spiked” and failed to appear. On the principle of better late than never, we have decided to present it (in slightly abbreviated form) to the readers of **MILLION** now that Jim Ballard’s new novel is imminent. David Pringle has added a postscript which brings the news of Ballard’s activities up to date.

views seem to have gone well. The audiences have been first-class for the readings, very large audiences, highly intelligent questions. Whether it will sell any of the books is another matter. All the journalists, even the local radio and TV stations, seem very well prepared and appear to have read *The Day of Creation*. In England, where I’m far better known, I’m frequently interviewed by people who are relying on researchers’ questions – which makes for a very stilted kind of conversation. There are no follow-up questions, or the follow-ups are bizarre because they’re confused about who you are.

**Kadrey:** With all the flying you’ve had to do on the trip, and with your own obvious interest in flying [Jim in *Empire of the Sun* and many other Ballard characters dream of flying] does something like the Aloha airliner coming apart in midair affect you?

**Ballard:** That had already happened before I left home. TWA, or whoever it was, had arranged that as a morale-building exercise two days before I got my plane! Of course, the kind of flying I’m interested in isn’t the kind I’ve been doing for the last week. Flying is something





J.G. Ballard

that the passenger is scarcely aware of: you step into what is, in effect, a small movie theatre, with the latest movies projected on a very low-definition screen while people push strange assortments of food into your lap. Then suddenly the lights come on and you step out into what appears to be an identical airport. That's all part of the curious anonymity of modern living, where everything blurs around the edges into an overall continuum of imperceptible change. Unlike the period when I did my first travelling, back in the 30s and 40s – crossing a frontier, taking a steamer, you were made to recognize the cultural shift very dramatically, even in European countries that had been neighbours for a thousand years. The transformation, say, from France to Italy, France to Spain, across their common borders, was a bigger journey than nowadays coming from England to the States. Then, the national boundaries were real and one had to make huge mental adjustments to cope. Today, of course, the changes are imperceptible so that you're scarcely aware of them. Now you have these big international hotels and airports all planned in the same style by multinational companies providing the decor of life.

**Kadrey:** Steven Spielberg's version of *Empire of the Sun* was released in the States in December 1987. Does it feel odd that after twenty books you should suddenly become famous because of a movie?

**Ballard:** If it had happened fifteen or twenty years ago I might have been sufficiently inexperienced in the ways of the world to think they all loved me for my prose style. [Laughs.] But at my age nobody loves you for your prose style, just as nobody loves a beautiful woman for her kind nature. Obviously, I'm not the first writer to reach a larger part of the audience because of the movies. That's happened many times before with many other writers. Serious writers, as opposed to popular writers, who have become well-known without movies being made from their books are very rare. It's only a writer like Borges whose fame is not dependent on any movie. But where would Anthony Burgess be without Kubrick's *Clockwork Orange*? Movies are a huge help, particularly if you're a genre writer, which I am to a large extent still considered to be. It's hard for a genre writer to escape from the category without the lift-off provided by a movie.

**Kadrey:** Do you see yourself as having escaped being classified as an SF author?

**Ballard:** In Europe I'm not regarded as a science-fiction writer because it's my books of the 1970s, *Crash*, *Concrete Island* and *High-Rise*, that I'm known for there. People here [in America] remember *The Crystal World* and so on. The early SF books did far better here than



my 70s books, which did very modestly. Really, I've written very little SF in the last twenty years. Most of my SF dates back to the early and mid-60s, but these labels stick and I don't mind being called a science-fiction writer. The novels I've written throughout the 70s and 80s have really belonged in the category of "imaginative fiction." *The Day of Creation* is an imaginative novel, but it can be read as a realistic novel.

**Pringle:** So how do you define "imaginative fiction"?

**Ballard:** Any fiction that places a premium on the use of the creative imagination – as opposed to realistic fiction. The great river of the human imagination that runs all the way back to the myths and legends of antiquity, to folk-tales and fairy tales of the middle ages, to the first great romance literature, to the 19th-century novel, books like *Alice in Wonderland*. In our own time, most of the genres – certainly science fiction, the Gothic novel, the ghost story, and modern fantasy in its various forms – fit into the category of imaginative fiction. But it also includes a great number of serious works, from *Moby Dick* to *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the novels of William Burroughs, and so on. Science fiction is part of this.

**Pringle:** And you would define science fiction as anything that's inspired specifically by science?

**Ballard:** Yes, that's what separates science fiction from fantasy on the one hand and from realistic fiction on the other. It's very important that there's some connection with science. A lot of what masquerades as SF isn't really science fiction at all these days. It's not inspired by science, it's inspired by other SF, in some cases, or it's inspired by fantasy. My feeling about a lot of the SF writers of the 70s and 80s, Ursula Le Guin and others of the period, is that they're not really interested in science as such – unlike, say, William Gibson and his Cyberpunks, Bruce Sterling, etc.: it seems to me they *are* inspired by science and by developments in computers and the media landscape.

**Pringle:** Tell us more about what you mean by "the media landscape."

**Ballard:** I mean the landscape of television, modern communications, radio, mass magazines, newspapers, advertising, image-styled consumer goods. The urban landscape is to a large extent now a terrain constructed with imaginative ends in mind. I mean the whole panoply of that largely synthetic environment that has wrapped itself around this planet.

**Pringle:** How do you think this has changed us in the last few decades?

**Ballard:** Enormously. The global telecommunications umbrella finally wrapped itself completely around us by the end of the 1960s, and it then redefined reality as itself. That was a remarkable development in its own right, but the extraordinary thing – and I think it will be regarded by future historians as a significant moment – is that the public at large accepted this distinction, it accepted that the fictions of the mass media are reality. I notice that nobody ever uses phrases like "advertising

stunt" or "publicity stunt" any more. People in the 40s and 50s did use them: if some big balloon floated by in the shape of a hamburger, people said "Oh, it's a publicity stunt" – but they don't any longer. The sorts of things that take place, particularly where politics and advertising meet, the world of pseudo-events, are accepted as the real world now. You see this in the presidency of Ronald Reagan – people were quite happy to have as president a man who was a complete construct of image-making. At the start of his presidency people remarked on the way he seemed to confuse reality and fiction to the extent of referring to old World War II movies as if they had actually taken place, but I noticed that the critics of Reagan soon shut up because they discovered within two or three years that the public were quite happy to accept him on the terms that he'd defined. And that applies to large sections of life. People in Europe accept that the fictions of publicity campaigns and the like are the new reality. That's a huge shift.

**Pringle:** Since *Empire of the Sun* you've been regarded in England as a writer of "mainstream" fiction. What is life in the mainstream like?

**Ballard:** I'm swimming along in my own little subterranean counter-current, probably flowing in the opposite direction to the mainstream! I'm certainly not aware of being in the mainstream. My life hasn't changed at all, and certainly not my professional life as a writer. My imagination works in exactly the way it ever did. But I was never really part of the SF scene either, I never went to conventions, I never took part in SF conferences or anything of that kind. The only time that I was involved in an SF scene was in the days when Michael Moorcock was editing *New Worlds* back in the mid-60s – but that was really just a close friendship.

**Pringle:** Didn't you once go to an SF conference in Rio de Janeiro?

**Ballard:** Yes, but most of the writers I'd never met before and have never seen since. It was part of the film festival in 1969, and the star film was Kubrick's *2001*. In honour of this the festival organizers decided to hold a science-fiction conference, and they invited a large number of British and American writers. It was a pleasure to meet so many of these people whom I'd been reading for years. They were all there: Damon Knight, Sheckley and Harry Harrison. Philip José Farmer I met, and Heinlein. They were all very good company. Asimov wasn't there, Bradbury wasn't there, but almost all the writers whom I'd read keenly in the 50s, at about the time I was thinking of being an SF writer myself, were there. It was a successful gathering. But I've not been to any gathering of SF writers since then – and that was about the first I'd ever been to anywhere. So I was never a part of any scene. I'm definitely a maverick. *Empire of the Sun* was a mainstream success, but I don't go to literary festivals or conferences. As for the mainstream writers, most are so totally uninteresting. They are! Without naming any names, they are extraordinarily limited. In the mainstream, where I have friends is among painters and sculptors and people of that kind.

**Pringle:** You must have been aware, starting out in the late 1950s, that SF was regarded as very "low-class,"



a shoddy form of popular literature published in garish paperbacks?

**Ballard:** Yes, but that didn't bother me in the least. In fact it probably attracted me, if anything. I had of course the example of the surrealists, whom I admired enormously, and who were looked down upon in much the same sort of way. At the time I started writing I had a surrealist imagination, in many ways. This was the time when not only was SF looked down on, but surrealism as well. That didn't bother me because I had complete confidence in the importance of science fiction as a literature. I've said it many times, that I believe SF is the literature of the 20th century, and I still believe that – by which I don't mean necessarily the particular kind of SF that thrives at any given moment. I don't mean that Heinlein is going to outlive James Joyce. But the totality of SF may well be regarded in the future as the dominant form of fiction, just as Gothic architecture is regarded as the dominant form of architecture in the 13th century. Science fiction has responded to the greatest challenges the 20th century has offered, which the mainstream novel has not really done. I admire SF for the way it has

### J.G. Ballard UK Fiction Bibliography

Ballard's books were originally published in Britain by Victor Gollancz; then he moved to Jonathan Cape; then back to Gollancz (for *Empire of the Sun* – lucky them!); and now he is published by Harper Collins. All titles bar three have been paperbacked by Grafton Books, a subsidiary of Harper Collins. The three exceptions are *The Wind from Nowhere*, which the author now wishes to disown (there were a couple of UK printings from Penguin Books many years ago); *The Best of J.G. Ballard*, which has been reissued recently by Macdonald/Orbit; and *Running Wild*, which was specially commissioned by Century Hutchinson/Arrow for their novella series.

*The Wind from Nowhere*, 1962 (1967, UK)  
*The Drowned World*, 1962  
*The Four-Dimensional Nightmare*, 1963 (stories; later retitled *The Voices of Time*)  
*The Terminal Beach*, 1964 (stories)  
*The Drought*, 1965  
*The Crystal World*, 1966  
*The Day of Forever*, 1967 (stories)  
*The Disaster Area*, 1967 (stories)  
*The Overloaded Man*, 1967 (stories; later revised and retitled *The Venus Hunters*)  
*The Atrocity Exhibition*, 1970  
*Vermilion Sands*, 1971 (stories; 1973, UK)  
*Crash*, 1973  
*Concrete Island*, 1974  
*High-Rise*, 1975  
*Low-Flying Aircraft*, 1976 (stories)  
*The Best of J.G. Ballard*, 1977 (omnibus of stories)  
*The Unlimited Dream Company*, 1979  
*Hello America*, 1981  
*Myths of the Near Future*, 1982 (stories)  
*Empire of the Sun*, 1984  
*The Day of Creation*, 1987  
*Running Wild*, 1988 (novella)  
*War Fever*, 1990 (stories)  
*The Kindness of Women*, 1991

responded imaginatively to the great issues of our time – often in a rather naive way, but often very seriously.

However, the term has very different connotations in the United States than it does in Britain and Europe. Here, SF is very closely identified with *Star Wars* and *Star Trek*, Asimov and Heinlein, which it's not in Europe. There's a separation in people's minds between popular SF and, if you like, more serious SF, which has a long history and tradition in Britain. Very few English writers over the last hundred years have not, at some point, written something very close to SF. Kipling, for example, wrote a number of SF stories. And of course two of the greatest novels of the 20th century in any category, *Brave New World* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, were by British writers. Today you find Doris Lessing, Anthony Burgess, Kingsley Amis, all of whom have realized that the science-fiction way of seeing the world has a tremendous vitality. They were able to say something that they wouldn't be able to in the mainstream. So I think these categories are much more elastic in Europe, but we don't have what [the Americans] have – that is, a huge part of the publishing industry geared up for the production of SF and fantasy. In Europe, the position of SF is much closer to the publishing of SF that existed in the States in the 50s.

**Kadrey:** But doesn't it all balance out? I've heard that per capita the British buy many times more books than Americans.

**Ballard:** I don't know what the figures are, but I've been told that per-capita book sales in the softcover field are roughly the same in England and the States. The average person buys three paperbacks a year. But with a population of 250 million that's about three-quarters of a billion books. A hardcover book that sells 5,000 copies in England can get on to the bestseller list. You wouldn't remotely have a bestseller here with 5,000 copies. Here, a successful bestseller in hardback can sell 5,000 copies a week and keep doing so for twenty weeks. In France, the Goncourt winner of the best novel of the year can produce sales of a million copies, selling at hardcover prices. Goncourt winners regularly sell three-, four-, five hundred thousand copies, an inconceivable number in England. I don't think any hardcover work of fiction in England has sold that number, with the possible exception of something like *Watership Down*. According to my editor, Malcolm Edwards, *Empire of the Sun* was one of the biggest post-war "serious" bestsellers in England, and it only sold 110,000 copies. That is a phenomenal sale for Britain; it's actually more than the British sales of all my previous books put together, in both paper and hardcover. But even that is not all that large a sale by American standards, is it? I mean, Tom Wolfe's book, *Bonfire of the Vanities*, must be close to half a million copies, and presumably it will go on selling for quite a while.

I think you Americans buy and read more books proportionally than we do. The British are not a very literary people. It's a mistake to think that because we've got this great history of writers and poets, a great literary tradition, that the present-day British read. They're rather like the Italians with respect to their great history of painting. The average Italian isn't interested in Michelangelo. He's more interested in Gucci. The great art is just part of the air they breathe. The average Brit, if he wants to read, reads Jackie Collins. And why not?



**Kadrey:** Was it the World War II connection that caused *Empire of the Sun* to take off in England?

**Ballard:** Of course, because my book was about a small corner of the Second World War which had not been written about before. There are large numbers of people who read that book (and I know this from letters I've received) who didn't think of it as a novel. People I'd meet at signings would say, "I haven't read a novel in twenty years; yours is the first I've read." And they'd read it not because it was a novel, they'd read it as a piece of documentary history.

**Pringle:** What was the process of writing *Empire of the Sun* like? Was it gruelling?

**Ballard:** It wasn't substantially different from the process of writing my other novels, with the difference that the subject was presented to me on a plate by my own life. I didn't need to invent the subject matter: although I would describe the book as semi-autobiographical (it's half fact and half fiction), the factual elements in it have been reworked to turn them into a heightened version of the original events. In some respects it was a testing time, going back to that period so many years ago, but it's always been so immensely vivid in my mind that it wasn't difficult to do. Curiously enough, I had very strong visual memories of the camp, but writing about it in detail brought back other memories that I'd completely forgotten: the terrible smell of the place, the heat and terrific humidity in the summer, and the fierce cold in the winter. All those things I'd forgotten, the texture of everyday life in the camp, came back. The particularly awful taste of sweet potatoes – not, I may say, the golden sweet potato that Americans eat, but the grey sweet potato that was a cattle-feed in China: small foul things. All that came back. Yes, it was gruelling to that extent.

**Kadrey:** Have you heard from anybody who was in Shanghai during the war at the same time you were?

**Ballard:** Last night a woman came up to me who, as a child, had actually been in the same building in the camp as I was. She had a school photograph taken in something like 1938 that showed me as a little seven-year-old. It was rather touching. Also last night a man came up to me who had also been in the camp. So that was two people, last night alone. When I was on a local radio station in Chicago the host invited listeners to call in, and a call came through from an American woman who said, "My name is Marion Kendall Ward. I'm married to an old friend of yours, Malcolm Kendall Ward." The last time I saw Malcolm was a few days after Pearl Harbor. He was my closest childhood friend. Of course, the war came and we went in different directions, and I never heard from him again. He's now living in Chicago. It was all quite strange. All I need now is some rather bad-tempered voice saying, "Jim Ballard, my name is so-and-so. I have your baby with me. He is now forty and wants to meet Daddy."

**Kadrey:** Did the images in Spielberg's movie match what you remembered about the war?

**Ballard:** Downtown Shanghai certainly did because it was the real place. The house where Jim lives was actually

filmed near London, where they found a house that resembled the house where I (they couldn't film at the real house, which is still standing, because it was in a state of dilapidation and occupied by about ten Chinese families). The camp sequences were filmed in Spain. They didn't get permission from the Chinese authorities to get into the actual camp, which still exists some ten miles south of Shanghai. It had been a big teacher training college before the war, and it consisted of a lot of cement dormitories and classroom buildings, about half of which had been destroyed by the fighting in 1937. They built wooden huts to house some of the inmates. The huts have all been cleared away since the war, but the cement buildings are still standing: they're part of the military base adjacent to the airfield. The camp that Warners built in Spain did not look like the actual camp. It wasn't as large as our camp, which held about two thousand people.

Notwithstanding that, the atmosphere within the camp is remarkably well conveyed. It's very accurate in its day-to-day look, in the way people lay around and wandered about, and tried to grow a few tomatoes, watched the Japanese planes taking off. The listlessness. The final twenty minutes of the movie when Jim, after the war has ended, is wandering around this shot-up landscape hunting for candy bars among the canisters Americans air-dropped into the camp and nearby, was remarkably accurate. Bear in mind that Spielberg wasn't even alive at the time. It brilliantly conveys the very strange atmosphere, because I remember wandering around in exactly the same way. I used to ride around with these ex-prisoners in some puppet general's Buick that they'd got hold of, looting villages for air-dropped supplies (which, of course fell miles away from the camp).

**Kadrey:** So all in all you liked the film?

**Ballard:** Yes, I was very impressed by it. I think it's Spielberg's most adult film to date. It's a remarkably honest film: there's no attempt for happy endings. Right at the end when the boy is reunited with his parents, bearing in mind how Hollywood has traditionally handled that, and how Spielberg might have handled it, it is in fact remarkably downbeat and bleak. The only thing I disliked about the film was the music. I thought the celestial choirs ran counter to the spirit of the film. It may be that the American teenage audiences need cues to feel emotion. The film's only done modestly [in America], but it's done far better in Europe and Britain. In Europe, of course, people have first-hand experience of war and occupation, whereas here those experiences are beyond anything you've known.

**Pringle:** At the British premiere of *Empire of the Sun* you met the Queen, didn't you?

**Ballard:** Yes. It was a Royal Command Performance, which the Queen attended, and there was a line-up. She walked down the line and everyone associated with the film was introduced to her. We exchanged a few words. It was an extraordinary evening. [Laughs.] There's nothing like starting one's film career at the top! At a fairly late stage in my life as a writer, I had something filmed not by some unknown Czech or Danish filmmaker but by the most successful film maker in history.



**Kadrey:** I heard that years ago you wrote an original script for a dinosaur movie.

**Ballard:** Back in the 60s, Hammer Films made a remake of the original *One Million Years B.C.*, with Raquel Welch. The remake was a success, and they decided to make a sequel to their remake. They asked if I would do the original treatment, which I did. This was a film without dialogue, you would just hear a lot of grunts. I didn't actually write a script: the shooting script was written by the director. For my treatment, I got a screen credit, my only screen credit up till *Empire of the Sun*. I'm very proud that my first screen credit was for what is, without doubt, the worst film ever made. [The movie in question is *When Dinosaurs Ruled the Earth*, directed by Val Guest in 1969.] An appallingly bad film that only distantly resembled anything in my original treatment. I've had almost nothing to do with TV and film, deliberately.

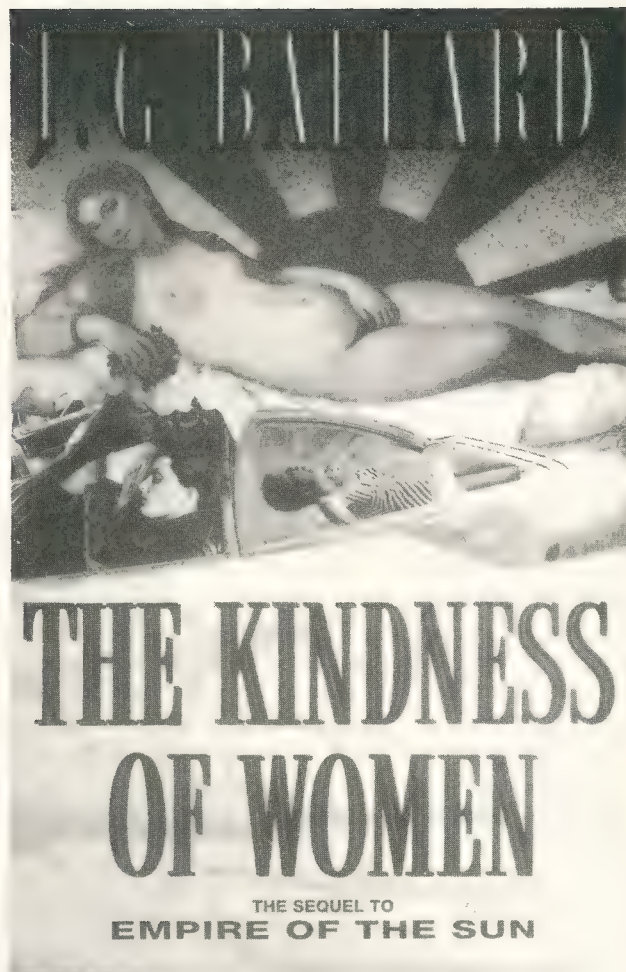
**Kadrey:** That seems odd, since your own work is saturated with references to these types of mass media.

**Ballard:** But I'm writing from the point of view of the ordinary man in the street. I'm interested in the man watching the TV, not the man making the programmes. I had involvements with adapting one or two of my own short stories which were done for TV back in the 60s. I found it all insufferably bureaucratic. It's completely unlike the film world, where a senior producer-director like Spielberg will determine the outcome of everything in the film. That is not true in television (and I speak with a little bit of insider's knowledge because one of my daughters works for the BBC). TV programmes are made by committees of people: you're dealing with a highly conventionalized medium run by huge bureaucracies where the margins of creative possibility are extremely narrow, if they exist at all, as I point out in *The Day of Creation*.

**Kadrey:** Sanger, the documentary film-maker in *The Day of Creation*, is kind of a pathetic character.

**Ballard:** But very tenacious. I've met people like that. There are small, independent TV companies all over the place. Since the success of *Empire of the Sun*, I've been approached by small companies who've asked me if I would front programmes about China. I've said "maybe" to them, and that's been enough for them to go and try to raise money. My Professor Sanger isn't a work of the imagination, his counterparts exist by the hundred. *The Day of Creation* is about a man, Dr Mallory, who achieves the miracle of accidentally creating a river that is going to transform the desert and make it green again. He finds that within minutes his discovery has been seized upon by this down-at-heels TV director who wants to make another of his trashy wildlife films. The book is about Mallory's struggle to break free from the clichés of this TV man, and see this extraordinary event in its own light – something he can barely do, so all-embracing is the media landscape of the present day. In part, my book is about the difficulty we all have in seeing anything untrammelled by the kind of clichés that the media have imposed on everything.

**Kadrey:** You've written Sanger so that even though he's



making films about nature, he seems completely lost in it.

**Ballard:** Absolutely: he deals, like all these people, in a complete fiction. It's their Disneyfied version of nature that they're concerned with. Nature to them is a friendly, bushy-tailed mammal. It's those sort of clichés that, sadly, people take to be the real world of nature. They're genuinely surprised when they go on holiday to Thailand or somewhere and within two or three days have picked up some nasty disease. And I don't mean just dysentery, I mean some nasty nervous disease. This wasn't in the TV documentary about Thailand and its noble elephants.

**Kadrey:** Are you still interested in medicine? I know you have a medical background.

**Ballard:** I did study medicine for a couple of years a long time ago. But I've always been interested in the sciences on a pretty broad front, and from my very first stories, from *The Drowned World* onwards, science and the way we respond to it has provided the dominant images of my fiction. I've not been interested in astronautics in any way, it's not a subject that of much interest to me, but I'm certainly very interested in the psychological sciences, and in psycho-pharmacology and so on. It all stems from my original interest in medicine and how we perceive our bodies. When I was cutting up cadavers in the anatomy theatre at Cambridge University back in the late 1940s, *Gray's Anatomy* sat beside me as I separated nerve from blood-vessel. It struck me that in a



curious way there was absolutely no connection between *Gray's* and the human cadaver that I was dissecting – even though *Gray's Anatomy* is a huge atlas of the human body packed with the most beautiful colour illustrations of dissected parts. There was no connection between the two! The reality of the dissected human body and the illustrations and diagrams in *Gray's Anatomy* are completely separate. As I've said before, in many ways *Gray's Anatomy* is a great work of fiction, perhaps the greatest. It represents the sort of view we all have of our bodies: we're extremely familiar with them, at least from the outside, but it's a highly conventional view, rather like a very conventionalized marriage where the partners after many years never embrace, never even touch each other.

**Pringle:** Is there any favourite work of your own which in your opinion has got rather lost and forgotten?

**Ballard:** Well, *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which I hope will be reissued by the San Francisco publishing house Re/Search next year in a new illustrated edition. That's always been for me one of my most important books, where I really tried to analyse what was going on at the point where the media landscape meets our own central nervous systems. What is the real significance of Marilyn Monroe's death or of the Kennedy assassination? What do they do to us on a neural level, on the unconscious levels of the brain? Do these media events, like the suicide of Monroe, the assassination of Kennedy, the election of Reagan (who is referred to in *The Atrocity Exhibition* fifteen years before the event), have some deep significance buried within our minds, do they touch our imaginations in unexpected ways? I was trying to analyse the formulas of the world we live in. So that was an important book for me. I keep thinking that I ought to write a follow-up book in the same form: perhaps one of these days I will.

**Kadrey:** One final question: frequently your books feature protagonists who find themselves confronting some overwhelming situation, and instead of fighting it they embrace it and learn to live with it. Isn't that a kind of metaphor for your experience in World War II?

**Ballard:** I think that's absolutely true. My imagination was hardwired, if you like, by the time I was fifteen, shaped by my experiences during the war. In all my fiction I've gone on re-using that, in that I perceive everyday reality as if it is some kind of continuation of the war by other means. Particularly from the civilian point of view, war isn't a matter of continuous gunfire and dive bombers. Anybody who's been in the armed forces will tell you that most of the time you're doing nothing. Even if you're a frontline infantryman or driving a tank, you're doing nothing. There are brief moments of violence, but you'll probably never see the enemy. For a long period during the occupation, running from 1937 when the Japanese invaded China and seized most of Shanghai, all the way through to '45, there was a mysterious sense of a lull before a storm, or a very mysterious lull after a storm. Everything pregnant with hidden danger and possibility – in a sense, like the world we live in now. What I call the media landscape has transformed ordinary reality into a huge dream that needs to be analysed if any sense is to be made of it. I've used the basic formulas that I learned as a child during the war to understand what is called "peace."

**Postscript:** Since the above interview was conducted in 1988, the promised illustrated edition of Ballard's *The Atrocity Exhibition* has indeed appeared from the San Francisco small press Re/Search. It's a fascinating volume, beautifully produced, and it contains several thousands of words of new annotations by the author. Also published last year, to coincide with his 60th birthday in November 1990, was a new story collection, *War Fever*, which contains some SF pieces in Ballard's classic vein – wry and moody tales of a future Cape Canaveral and other locations abandoned to the sand dunes as men and women turn to the richer visions of their Inner Space.

On the movie front, the latest word is that Ballard's 1973 novel *Crash* will now definitely be filmed by producer Jeremy Thomas (of *The Last Emperor* fame) and director David Cronenberg (of *The Fly* and many others).

But the most significant news is that Ballard has finished his "follow-up" novel to *Empire of the Sun*. To be published by Collins on 19th September 1991, it is entitled *The Kindness of Women*. By no means a direct sequel to the earlier novel, it nevertheless overlaps with that book in terms of its subject matter. Opening in Shanghai in 1937, it covers a fifty-year time-span and is episodic in structure. Clearly very autobiographical, it is the first-person narrative of a "Jim" who may or may not be the same person as the boy from *Empire of the Sun*. Three quarters of the book concerns his adult life – studying medicine in Cambridge in the late 1940s, serving with the RAF in Canada in the mid-1950s, his marriage, the death of his wife while on holiday in Spain in 1964, the wild years of the late 1960s, and much more.

Most of it is intensely moving and lyrical. Some of it may be considered shocking. It is certainly a very unconventional novel. I wait with considerable interest to see what the critics and the wider public will make of it. My prediction is that *The Kindness of Women* will be a bestseller, though it's unlikely to have the appeal to all age-groups which made *Empire of the Sun* a super-seller in British terms.

(David Pringle)

## Back Issues of MILLION

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# Beyond the Berlin Wall

## Daniel Easterman

**F**or some people, it was the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. For others, it was the fall of Ceausescu. For me, it was the dangerously attractive Joanna Kanska playing the role of a KGB major in a BBC drama series. For six glorious weeks, I was glued to my set, wishing I too could be captured and interrogated by Russian intelligence. That was when I knew things could never be the same again. It just isn't done to feel that way about the KGB. Fear, yes. Terror, certainly. But lust?

In some ways, *Sleepers* said all that was needed about the end of the Cold War. Two KGB sleepers have become totally Anglicized and dread returning to Russia: one has a wife, family, and toy monkey in the Midlands, the other £300,000 a year and a career in the City. The Russian Ambassador in London speaks with an American accent and wears a baseball cap. And Joanna Kanska wears very tight sweaters.

By contrast, the serialization of *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*, which started its second screening just after *Sleepers*, felt decidedly dated. Moles, lamplighters, the Circus, Moscow Central: they all belonged to another era. Obviously, John le Carré is not about to turn his hand to humour, so just where is he to turn now the lights are going up all over Europe, the Stasi are lining up for their pension books, and the KGB have appointed a Public Relations Officer?

Where, for that matter, are any of us to turn? Is the age of the thriller gone? Will writers like myself be forced to sign up with Mills & Boon or take lessons from Jilly Cooper? Just imagine it: Joan le Carré's *The Nurse Who Went Down with a Cold*; Gwen Deighton's *Wedding in Berlin*; or Thomasina Clancy's *The Hunt for the Red Petticoat*.

It's not a laughing matter, of course. Fancy sharing the dole queue with a dozen other writers in drag.



Daniel Easterman is a former lecturer in Islamic Studies. He has written several bestselling novels: *The Last Assassin*, *The Seventh Sanctuary*, *The Ninth Buddha*, and *Brotherhood of the Tomb*. His latest book, *Night of the Seventh Darkness*, was published in July by Grafton Books. A collection of essays on Islam, religious fundamentalism and the Rushdie affair will be published next spring by Paladin. A ghost story entitled *Naomi's Room* will be published under the pen-name "Jonathan Aycliffe" this autumn.

Fancy trying to chat up KGB majors while dressed like Barbara Cartland or Jackie Collins. No joke at all.

In fact, the whole thing only really seems funny if one regards thrillers as such to be a subject for levity (and the British literary establishment is full of those who do). But thrillers, like other forms of fiction, do, in fact, mirror certain realities in the wider world. Mirror them and, to some extent, foster them.

The Cold War gave us James Bond and George Smiley, SMERSH and Karla because they were, in their

fashion, tokens of how we wanted to view the world, of how others wanted us to view it. At its most crass, the Cold War (courtesy of Hollywood) gave us Rambo and *Red Dawn*, semi-paranoid images of red-blooded (sorry, blue-blooded) American heroism face to face with Russian/Chinese/Vietnamese thuggery and cowardice. And from time to time the thriller turned the tables, confronting the cold warriors with less blatant images: the moral dilemmas of le Carré or the demythologizing of Deighton.



So, now all that is gone – iron curtains and barbed-wire walls, Vietnam and Afghanistan – where in all seriousness will the writers of adventure and spy fiction turn? The answer was obvious years ago, and is scarcely less so in the wake of recent events. To the Middle East, of course, to the great crossroads where East and West first confronted one another centuries ago.

Leaving aside all those early struggles between Greeks and Achae-menids, Romans and Carthaginians, Byzantines and Sassanids, the first great ideological division of the world began with the Arab conquests and the rise of Islam. Islam as religion and Islam as political force. The struggle between Muslims and Christians took many guises, but it was deep-rooted, it endured without walls, spies, or Cruise missiles to prop it up. Subject to all manner of modifications, it has entered a new phase in the past decade.

The Muslim conquest of Spain (and the later Christian Reconquista), the Battle of Tours, the Crusades, the Fall of Constantinople, the Siege of Vienna, and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire today seem not so much history as prelude. It may seem absurd, but fourteen centuries after the first Arab armies thundered into Egypt and Syria, we are still at it. America should last so long. Marxism should be that persistent. How long since the Russian revolution? Seventy-four years? How long since the start of the Cold War? Forty-six years? Grains in the cosmic egg-timer.

Fourteen centuries of the same conflict? Am I being serious? In a way, yes. Pick up almost any book by a modern Arab fundamentalist writer and there it will be in black and white: the standard term for the modern West – *al-salibiyun*, the Crusaders. The struggle for the Holy Land, for Jerusalem, for ideological supremacy in the Mediterranean is no mere hangover from the Middle Ages, it is a daily conflict played out today in the *intifada*, the hijacking of airliners, and the taking of hostages.

It is no coincidence that, the moment the Cold War thawed, we entered a full-scale conflict with a Muslim state. The immediate rights and wrongs of the Gulf War are beside the point: I firmly believe that we chose to fight Saddam Hussein simply because there was a vacuum

that had to be filled and that we chose Iraq because we have yet to exorcise age-old demons bequeathed to us by our crusading ancestors.

The prolongation of the Cold War served to blind many of us to one of the central realities of international affairs in the past century and more: that the European powers and, more latterly, the United States have been in a constant state of cold and, from time to time, hot war with the Islamic world. I say “the Islamic world” rather than “the Arab world” because non-Arab states like Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan have played and still play central roles in this conflict.

In the past two centuries the West has either colonized or fought wars with one Muslim state after another. During World War I, Britain and her allies fought and dismembered the Turkish empire. After that, Western powers have been involved in one struggle after another: the Italians in Libya, the French in Algeria, the British in Aden, the British, French and Israelis in Suez, Israel in a succession of wars with her neighbours, the Americans in Lebanon, almost everybody and his uncle in Kuwait. And when we have not been at war, we have been overthrowing governments (as the CIA did in Iran in 1953) or using secret agents to further our policies.

The Iranian Revolution of 1979 cast a wide shadow across the globe, conjuring up visions of widespread destabilization in the Middle East and terrorism everywhere else. The images that our media conjured up then were simply continuations of much earlier myths: turbaned and bearded fanatics filled with hatred of Western civilization, veiled women, the romance of the desert, a harsh God, oil sheikhs, wild-eyed terrorists. Tired and naive stereotypes filled our newspapers and our television screens.

Nor has the standard Muslim image of the West been any more notable for its insight or sophistication: an unholy cabal of “Crusaders,” Communists, and Zionists bent on the destruction of Islam and the enslavement of all Muslims; London, Paris, and New York as hotbeds of licence and depravity; whole nations drenched with wine and poisoned by gambling, usury, and prostitution; knowledge suborned in the interests of raw power; the *Satanic Verses* part of a wider,

deliberate campaign against the honour of the Prophet and the integrity of Islam.

So, it seems obvious what we thriller writers have to do. Like someone whose pet monkey has gone missing, we go out and buy another one. New plots for old. For Russians, substitute Arabs; for Czechs, Iranians; for Communist party apparatchiks, cadres of Islamic Jihad; for the KGB, SAVAMA and the Arab *mukharbarat*; for the Berlin Wall, the sun-kissed shores of North Africa or the gun emplacements of Kuwait City. *Plus ça change...*

The Easternization of the thriller has, of course, already begun. James Clavell's *Whirlwind*, Ken Follett's *On the Wings of Eagles*, Leon Uris's *The Haj*, A.J. Quinnel's *The Mahdi*, Gerald Seymour's *Home Run*, *At Close Quarters*, and, more recently, *Condition Black*, my own *Last Assassin* and *Seventh Sanctuary* are only a few of the many thrillers with Middle East settings written in the past ten years. *The Satanic Verses* entered the history books as the first novel actually to play a role in its own drama.

With the Gulf War behind us, we seem set for long-term confrontation with the Islamic East, and it is certain that writer after writer will turn his thoughts to the region. I am already working on my sixth novel, a tale set in Egypt after a fundamentalist takeover in 1999. I am sure I am not alone.

So far so good. The thriller, at least, is safe. But not even thrillers exist in a vacuum. They reflect reality, they foster their own realities. But, like even the best mirrors, they also distort the world. For some time now, there has been a growing awareness in some intellectual circles that Western writers, artists, journalists, historians, and others have portrayed the Islamic world in a manner that misrepresents and discolours both people and culture. This process is known as “Orientalism,” and accusations of such distortion have recently become a standard feature of Muslim writing about the modern world. Arabs, Iranians, Pakistanis and others see themselves as victims of a campaign of vilification and abuse that stretches back to the Middle Ages, and in some measure they are right. Popular images of the Middle East in the Western



media are undeniable stereotypes, and the fact that Muslim writing about the West is itself a mass of inaccuracies does not make it any better.

The thriller is, by its nature, a literary genre rooted in confrontation and, by necessity, the use of stereotypes. It will be ironic if, at a time when we have begun to see our former Communist enemies as human beings, we embark on a new round of dehumanization with regard to Muslims, and yet that is what we seem bound to do. I am a trained Islamicist, with a knowledge of Middle Eastern languages, and yet I am still guilty of distortion in my fiction. It is hard to be free of it.

Sadly, some form of continuing conflict now seems inevitable. Modern Western and Islamic values are, in many ways, incompatible. It is not just the diehard fundamentalists in the Middle East who seek to reject the West and its ways of thought and action. And in our own societies racial tensions seem likely to grow in the next few decades. At the heart of those tensions lie relations with the eight million or so Muslims living

in Europe, particularly in France, Germany, and Britain.

I confess that I have no easy answers to the dilemma in which I find myself. I want to be fair and accurate in what I write, and yet my fiction is bound to reflect real conflicts in the real world, where fairness and accuracy are not highly prized values. And just as there were always thriller writers during the Cold War who could be relied on to paint a grim picture of Communism while writing in glowing terms of the "Free World," there will be those for whom all Arabs will remain unwashed fanatics and all Iranians suicidal extremists.

The passing of the Cold War does not, then, spell the end of the thriller. It will be some time yet before anyone can write a Middle Eastern *Sleepers*. Like Russia some years ago, the Islamic world does not seem particularly funny. But the present situation does present all of us, writers and readers alike, with new challenges and new opportunities. What we will make of them remains to be seen.

(Daniel Easterman)

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## BRIAN STABLEFORD

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# "I'm Always Writing About My Fears"

Bestselling American fantasist (and erstwhile pornographer) Anne Rice is interviewed by **Katherine Ramsland**

Since the 1976 advent of *Interview With the Vampire*, Anne Rice's first novel, she has written twelve books. Best known for her vampire trilogy (including *The Vampire Lestat*, and *The Queen of the Damned*), Rice has also written erotica, historicals and other supernatural fiction. Her latest is *The Witching Hour*, which deepens many of her earlier themes. It is about several generations of witches in league with an evil spirit whose plan for himself addresses the impact of free will on moral questions. This seemingly disparate body of work is in fact unified by the way it parallels Rice's psychological evolution, and at the age of 49, she feels that she has worked through some dark issues and has realized many of her dreams.

Rice's first novel found a phenomenal reception, earning nearly one million dollars from hardcover, paperback and movie deals. She wrote about a young man, Louis, who becomes a vampire in 19th-century New Orleans. He spends several decades coming to terms with the idea that he is a monster that kills to survive but there is no God to judge him: "Am I damned? Am I from the devil? What have I become in becoming a vampire?" The story captures intimately the loneliness and guilt he experiences from being trapped by limited possibilities and confronted with the need for inner spiritual resources. The vampire's experience is one of almost transcendent quality ("It was as if I had only just been able to see colours and shapes for the first time") and Louis offers a new way to look at mortal life. The novel, with its lush language and moral questing, tapped into a culture seeking to replace traditional religion and found a sympathetic audience. Readers remarked on its emotional resonance: "She goes into the darkness," said one fan about Rice, "and illuminates it for us."

Rice knows all about that darkness. Born in New Orleans in 1941, she was raised by a mother whose vision of what life should be outdistanced her means to achieve it, and who died in despair from alcoholism when Anne was fifteen. Anne Rice also lost a five-year-old daughter to leukemia and sought her own solace for several years in alcohol. When she began to write from the point of view of a creature of the night, she discovered that the fictional buffer it provided between herself and real life worked well for her. "Seeing through Louis's eyes," she says, "allowed me to write about life in a way I hadn't been able to do in a contemporary novel. I couldn't make my life believable in that form. I didn't know how to use it. When I abandoned

that struggle and wrote *Interview With the Vampire*, it all came together for me."

She wrote the novel in five weeks. Before the year was out, it had found a home at Alfred A. Knopf publishers with editor Victoria Wilson, who was astonished by the vision. "I had never read anything as extraordinary and peculiar and seductive."

Despite early success, Rice was unable to reach that audience again for almost a decade. She wrote two historical novels, *The Feast of All Saints* about a society in New Orleans known as the free people of colour, and *Cry to Heaven*, about castrated Italian opera singers seeking self-actualization as artists. Then she switched gears and turned to pornography and erotica, signalling the change by adopting two pseudonyms. As A.N. Roquelaure ("Anne under the cloak"), Rice wrote a fairy tale trilogy, *The Claiming of Sleeping Beauty*, *Beauty's Punishment* and *Beauty's Release*, to express pornographic fantasies of dominance and submission that she wanted to read but was unable to find. *Exit to Eden* and *Belinda*, a little more tame but involving more complex character development and contemporary settings, were written as Anne Rampling. In addition, Rice took a detour by creating *The Mummy*, a light-hearted romp of an immortal man through Edwardian England. Her hero, Ramses, awakens Cleopatra and gives her immortality. Rice thought of the novel as sheer fun, giving her a break from the more serious nature of most of her other books.

*Anne Rice lost a five-year-old daughter to leukemia and sought solace for several years in alcohol*

Rice is currently on the fourth novel in the vampire series, tentatively titled, *The Body Thief* (or possibly *Body and Soul*). "This could be the last one," she says. "It is certainly being structured as if it were. More and more it seems to be an answer to the questions raised in *Interview With the Vampire*. I'll write again about the vampires if something comes to me, but this definitely feels like a concluding book."

The novel is a continuation of the story begun in *The Vampire Lestat* in which Lestat, Louis's vampire mentor, becomes a rock star in the 1980s. Adventurous and feisty, he exhibits a greater range of sensuality and bisexual



attraction than had Louis, while being more decidedly assertive. Lestat quickly became Rice's favourite character. "If I were a vampire," she admits, "I would want to be Lestat. My idea with him was that he was a comic and tragic character combined, that he would be unkillable and always triumph in the comic sense. Yet he was also tragic because he had a great capacity to understand evil and suffering." Lestat embodies more powerfully than previous characters an intense androgynous quality. "I've always loved the images of androgyny," says Rice. "They always have immediate intense emotional impact on me. I see the androgynous figure as the ideal." Joining opposites like masculine and feminine, good and evil, spirit and flesh, Lestat becomes a godlike figure, echoing divinities of ancient times like Osiris and Dionysus and represented in the symbolism of Christ. As a vampire, he is evil, but he also possesses saintly qualities of courage and spiritual perception.

"What interested me," Rice explains, "is the transcendence and mixture of opposites. The reason I like to write about people who are bisexual is that I see them as transcending gender. I see opposites coming together in the person. To me, what's fascinating in art is to get inside evil and see the good inside it. I don't think you can understand evil until you do that. That doesn't for a moment mean that one excuses evil or sympathizes with it. I just want to understand what it's about, and so I go into the complexity of it."

Moving deeper into a comprehensive look at the vampire origins, Rice developed in the third novel of the trilogy, *The Queen of the Damned*, vampires who had been present when the first vampire, Akasha, was made. Akasha decides to take over the world by killing most of the mortal men, and the other vampires stand against her in defence of the human race. Readers responded to the mythological panorama.

"I think people are hungry for imagery and for the deeper truths that fantasy and myth give them," Rice says. "They want the intensity." In addition, she feels, they appreciate her moral vision. "I think people are passionately concerned about good and evil and about living a moral life."

## *Reviewers don't expect books about vampires or mummies to have subtlety or nuance*

**H**er writing has been a means for her of exploring complex philosophical issues of good and evil, but it also has offered a way for her to articulate ideas that have special meaning to her. "I think that you write a novel with your whole being," she explains. "I trust to that. I trust to feelings of authenticity." For each book, Rice typically adopts the point of view of her main character, male or female. Thus, she has seen through the eyes of a vampire, an opera singer, a mixed-blood adolescent, a dominatrix, a male artist, and an immortal man wrapped up as a mummy, to name just a few. Through them she has expressed her own beliefs. Says Marius, a two-thousand-year-old vampire in a moment of moral optimism: "Men and women are learning animals... They are creatures ever changing, ever improving, ever expanding their vision and the capacity of their hearts."



Anne Rice

Does she have a secret for capturing so many diverse points of view? "I just get into their skin," Rice explains, "and everything happens. It's not hard for me to create these various characters because they all represent longings and aspirations in myself."

Her waist-length black hair is her trademark and she is known for her direct, forthright manner. When asked a question, she peers through intelligent brown eyes while she carefully considers her answer. If asked the same question again, she may have a different response, having thought more about it. She takes what she says quite seriously, expects interviewers to do the same, and dislikes being dismissed with vampire jokes. Rice is accessible to fans and enjoys hearing their comments, placing more value on their responses than she does on what reviewers have to say. "In America," she insists, "book reviewing is irresponsible. There's no justice and no validity. No one is accountable and anyone is allowed to write a review. The number of reviews that really connect with the work in any worthwhile way is very low."

There has been a wide disparity in the way Rice has been reviewed, from the debut of her first novel to the present. "With my books," she says, "I always get vicious reviews and good ones; there's no critical consensus." Rice has been hailed as insightful and literary as well as panned for contrived plots, overblown language and petty characters. She has also been criticized for writing so much in the supernatural genre. Nevertheless, her growing success indicates that readers are responding. "The gulf between the way my books are received by readers," says Rice, "and the way they're received by reviewers is larger than with most American writers. Reviewers don't expect books about vampires or mummies to have subtlety or nuance."



**A**lthough Rice has used several settings for her novels, from Egypt to Haiti to London, one of the places to which many of the characters are drawn is New Orleans. It was there that she was indoctrinated in the Catholic Church and taught about the intimate relation between spirit and flesh that flavours much of her work. "I grew up in the only Catholic city in the country," she explains, "taught by nuns whose orders came from Catholic countries and by an order of priests that originated in Italy." They trained her in spiritual exercises that left a strong impression. "You sit there and you imagine what Christ felt as he walked down the street carrying the cross, what the thorns felt

## *Dickens is my idol because he wrote fast, he made a lot of money and he was a great writer*

like going into his forehead and the nails going into his hands. All this meant using your imagination – trying to make the leap into something else. It was natural to come out of that writing this kind of fiction. This is why it feels authentic to me to describe vampires speaking about good and evil and whether god exists because those were the preoccupations of that religion in my childhood. And it was filled with sensuality."

Adding yet more layers to her youthful imagination, Rice listened to the loquacious Irish storytellers among her relatives and she observed frequent rituals that sharpened her awareness of the dead. "In New Orleans, says one character from *The Witching Hour*, "we never really leave them out." It is no wonder that she feels at home with supernatural themes. "Writing supernatural fiction feels authentic to me," Rice insists. "I'd rather read supernatural fiction, too. It feels good. I don't think there's any moral, psychological or aesthetic limit to supernatural fiction. The first movie I ever saw was *Hamlet* and the only scenes I remember are the ghost scene and the one where Ophelia floated down the stream with the flowers coming out of her hair as she died. We tend to forget that *Hamlet* has ghosts and *Macbeth* has witches."

Rice was exposed early to classic themes in literature and to the magic of stories. Her mother, Katherine O'Brien, was determined that her children would be geniuses and she set about to raise them in a sophisticated atmosphere. She herself had been college-educated at a time when such a pursuit was rare for women, especially in the South, but she had not established a career. After her marriage to Howard O'Brien, a postal worker, she turned her ambitions to her four daughters. Katherine possessed such a prodigious memory that she was able to relate to her children whole segments of novels and movies verbatim. One of her favourite authors was Charles Dickens. One day Katherine related an incident that had occurred in the days when *The Old Curiosity Shop* was serialized and sent to America in segments. "She told me," says Rice, "that all the people were crowded on the New York Pier and as the boat approached, they shouted, 'Is Little Nell dead?' and the captain of the boat said 'Yes,' and the people sat down and cried. I heard later that they tore the pier apart. It was a great story about the emotional impact of fiction. I wanted to

affect people that way." As a result, she grew up with a love for the stories of Dickens.

"He's my idol because he wrote fast, he made a lot of money and he was a great writer. He also had great love and respect for his audience. I find it instructive to read about his energy and his flexibility. I find him endlessly inventive."

Her mother also told her stories of the supernatural, about ghosts and vampires. One story in particular caught Rice's attention. "When I was a child," she recalls, "we used to talk about books in my family. There was a story we had from the library called 'The White Silk Dress.' It was told from the point of view of a child vampire, in the first person. I thought it was wonderful. I never forgot it. I wanted to get into the vampire; that was the interesting point of view to me – the people right in the centre of it all."

**E**ncouraged by her mother, Rice spent hours with her sister Alice developing a fantasy life for their mutual entertainment. They used ideas from Shakespeare, told to them by their parents, and plots from radio shows and movies to weave their imaginary world. When Rice's mother eventually withdrew into her own dark world of alcoholism, the fantasies continued for Rice, gaining in complexity and intensity and enduring to the present day. "There is an on-going dream world," she says, "and it's contemporary. It involves people who have been in my dream-world since I was a child. There's a generation of characters who are my age, but there are also many people who are older and younger. They're a great source of enjoyment, and I'm sure they are helping the mind work out a psychological problem in a dramatic way. That's what storytellers do. We dramatize our psychological problems in terms of stories. It might be that if I wrote down everything that was going on in my imaginary world, it would be very revealing, but not to me. So I don't do it."

Her husband Stan had once asked her to write down the names of the people in her dream world, since he was getting confused by all the characters she mentioned. To his astonishment, she took out a sheet of paper and quickly wrote a list down the front and back of the paper. However, that was only *one* of her fantasy worlds. Another is a purely sexual fantasy set in the ancient world and involving slave markets. "It's very similar to what I wrote in the Roquelaure novels," Rice admits. A character, Elliott, from Rice's novel *Exit to Eden* mentions a similar fantasy. "I used to imagine something of a Greek myth... We were all youths in a very great Greek city, and every few years, seven of us... were sent to another city to serve as sexual slaves." Other than that brief description, Rice indicates that her "dream worlds" have little to do with her novels. Although she calls extensively on her imagination to create characters and mythologies, "it's different," she claims. "It doesn't feel like the dream worlds. There's not much literal overlap between those worlds and my writing. They exist for my entertainment."

**A**fter her mother died, Rice had to leave New Orleans to move to Texas, where she gave up her childhood faith. She eventually settled in San Francisco, California, after her marriage to Stan Rice, and lived there for 27 years. Increasingly, however, she yearned to return to her native city. She explored her



memories through her characters, and by sheer coincidence, New Orleans turned out to be the perfect setting for a vampire story. Moody and mystical, sinister and decaying, it seemed a place through which a vampire might pass almost unnoticed. "This was New Orleans," she wrote in her first novel, "magical and mystical. In which a vampire, richly dressed and gracefully walking through the pools of light of one gas lamp after another might attract no more notice in the evening than hundreds of other exotic creatures – if he attracted any at all –" Characters in succeeding novels were drawn there as well.

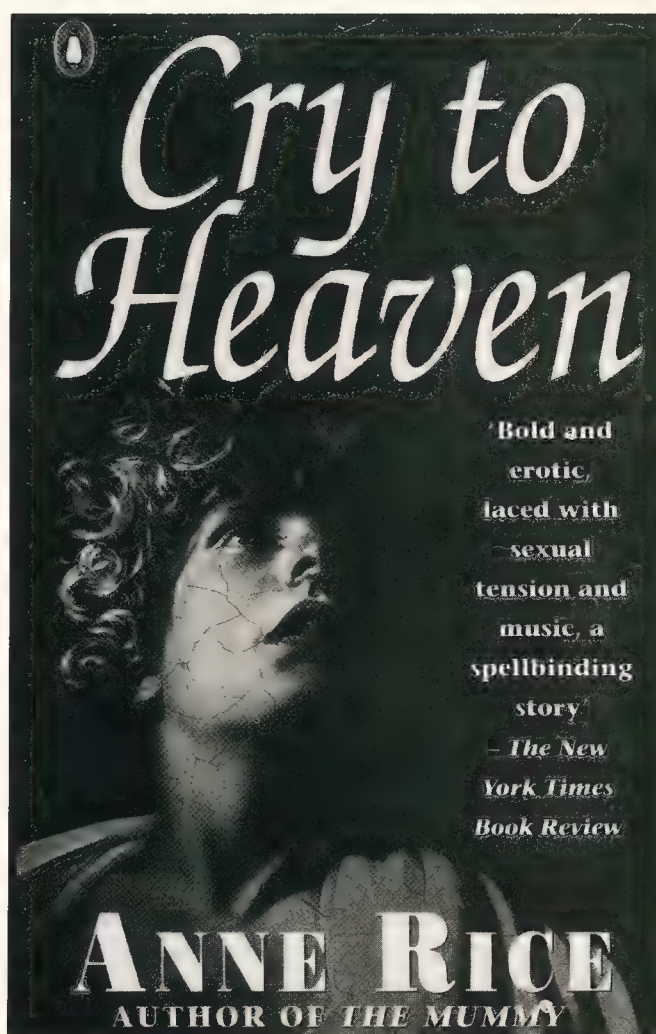
Eventually Rice decided it was time to go back. She had started to write *The Witching Hour*, setting it in New Orleans, but felt that she needed to live there to capture accurately the textures, sights and smells. In 1988, she and Stan and their ten-year-old son Christopher bought a second home a few blocks from where Rice grew up. It was a tentative decision that became firm when she spotted the house of her dreams in the Garden District.

The Garden District in New Orleans was settled in the mid-1800s by Americans. They built magnificent antebellum mansions in the area, inspired by Greek Revival and Italianate architectural styles. The quiet streets are shaded by massive oak trees, crepe myrtles and magnolias. As a child Rice had wandered daily through the area, staring enviously at the wealthy homes and distrustfully at those falling into disrepair: they had a haunted look. Having achieved bestseller status, she now had the money to buy one.

Rice purchased the house. "It was very important for me to come back to New Orleans," she says. "The older I got, the more bitter I became – and almost panic-stricken – about not being here. I couldn't establish any kind of rooted feeling in California. I needed to be near the landscape and the incidents of my childhood. I experience day-to-day contentment here. I'm glad to be back."

She changed the fictional setting of *The Witching Hour* to her new abode in order to bring authenticity to what she was writing. That way if a fight broke out in her novel, she could stand by the pool or in the room in which it occurred to absorb the atmosphere before she returned to her word processor to fill in the details. Rice likes to experience as much as possible what she writes about in order to give it the sensual intensity that she feels. In the process, she has haunted her own house. Having fleshed out her characters to the point of near three-dimensional reality, she indicates for guests where Lasher first appeared, where Rowan kept all her china, where Stuart Townsend's body lay wrapped in a rug or where Rowan killed Carlotta.

Even her central character, Michael Curry, borrows much of his background from Rice. "He is more like me than any other character," she admits, "except that I didn't have his father and I didn't grow up in the Irish Channel. Everything in these novels comes from my life, and there's more of it in Michael than in anything I've written so far." Michael shares with Rice a love of Charles Dickens, a desire for knowledge, a Catholic education, and an alcoholic mother. He is the same age as Rice was when she wrote the novel, has just returned from San Francisco and shares many of her attitudes and aspirations. It was exciting for her to come so close to touching her inner being. She calls this experience of intimate writing a way of getting close to *It* – an elusive sense of significance.



"It happens on different levels in different books," she explains. "It's the most intense moments in a book, the most absolutely, quintessentially interesting things. It's a feeling that what is happening on the page really, really matters. It's a moment of important truth – what you would utter on your deathbed about our struggle in the world – trying to boil it down, really get to that moment of exploding truth that would make your hair stand on end. In a novel like *The Witching Hour*, there's scene after scene like that: Michael and Rowan coming together, Michael coming back to New Orleans and standing in front of the house, Michael going down into the swimming pool – over and over again, getting to the nitty gritty of what it's all about. It happens more and more as I write. In some books there are pages and pages where I would build stages leading up to and away from *It*, and I've tried to eliminate those building blocks from my writing. I prefer it to be more crowded with those moments. Since I do write in an instinctive way and I do access the subconscious, to discover that truth can be a very surprising, spontaneous development."

While on one level Rice explores with her novels whatever interests her – the concept of immortality, near-death experiences or freedom from religious superstition – on another level, she goes within to draw out pain. "I'm always writing about my fears," she says. "It's an exorcism of fear." She is afraid of the dark, of fire, of heights and of being buried alive. But one of her more compelling fears is to be forgotten,



to be lost in oblivion. The expression of it comes through in fictional characters who seek a sense of something greater than themselves. One searches for God, another for security, another for the assurance that he won't disappear into obscurity. In *The Vampire Lestat*, Marius sums it up: "The idea was simply that there was someone who knew everything, somebody who had seen everything... a continual awareness."

"I've always found the idea of a continuous awareness to be very seductive," Rice says. "There's a great promise of order, of all the pain and suffering and confusion being redeemed in a moment of great illumination, harmony and understanding. I find misunderstanding excruciating. It was an idea I had as a child that I took for granted."

*She is afraid of the dark, of fire, of heights and of being buried alive. But one of her more compelling fears is to be forgotten*

I saw it as a sense of God at the final judgment – that everyone would be gathered together and the truth of every moment would be told. It's very comforting for me to read about near-death experiences when people say they experience that kind of life review, where they see how their actions affected other people. But I fear there is no continuous awareness."

Living now in New Orleans, the urgency for Rice of such reassurance is no longer as compelling. "Now that I'm back here," she says, "my fears about death, old age and the passage of time are much less because I'm where I want to be. I'm home."

Having journeyed through her fiction to the point at which she was ready to live once again in the city that held for her, as Louis the vampire puts it, "the great awful sadness of all the things I'd ever lost or loved or known," Rice has found a sense of satisfaction. Many of the themes that once obsessed her are laid to rest. Nevertheless, she has no thoughts of changing what she has been doing over the past two decades.

"Two things make me feel complete and alive," she insists, "writing and my family."

## America's Reading, or: Whatever Became of Harriet Beecher Stowe?

The results of a recent Gallup Poll in the United States of America should be of great interest to us students of popular fiction. Among writers of all types and periods, the current favourites among the US public are, in approximate descending order of popularity:

Stephen King  
Danielle Steel  
Louis L'Amour  
Sidney Sheldon  
Virginia Andrews  
James Michener  
Tom Clancy  
Charles Dickens  
Ernest Hemingway  
William Shakespeare  
John Steinbeck  
Mark Twain  
Isaac Asimov  
Dick Francis  
Alex Haley  
Robert Ludlum  
J.R.R. Tolkien

A fine old mix of names. Of all these authors, Mark Twain is the most widely read by Americans – but Stephen King is definitely the best loved. (Apart from the author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, other novelists who were once immensely popular and influential in America, but who now seem to have fallen from favour, include Sir Walter Scott, James Fenimore Cooper, Lew Wallace, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Margaret Mitchell.)

It's interesting to note that only four British names get onto the list – Shakespeare, Dickens, Tolkien and Dick Francis. No other "foreign" writers make the list at all: it seems only 16% of respondents had read anything by Tolstoy, and just 3% were familiar with any of the works of Flaubert. (When it comes to French writers, though, one is tempted to ask: what about Dumas, Jules Verne, Victor Hugo?)

Thanks to *Locus* for relaying this information.

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This year marks the 50th anniversary of Orson Welles' great film *Citizen Kane*. Here's a small tribute, in the form of a most unusual ghost story...

# The Snow Sculptures of Xanadu

## Kim Newman

**T**here had been a private zoo here once, but now only mosquitoes thrived. In the thick, sweaty heat, they pestered Welles. During his lifetime, Charles Foster Kane had decreed Xanadu insect-free, as if the force of his unstoppable will – the power that had shaped the destinies of nations – were able to hold back the swamplands surrounding his Florida fastness. The Pleasure Dome had begun to rot while Kane still lived, as his powers ebbed and history slowly crept past him, and, with his death twenty-five years ago, the decay had begun to accelerate. The walls were breached like those of a besieged city that has finally yielded, the stinking cages of the menagerie held only dead animals, forty-foot windows were patched over with boards. Welles thought that if the place were left to nature, it would inevitably sink like the House of Usher into the giant tarn surrounding it.

A fitting set for a ghost story.

The former Boy Wonder stood outside the gates of Xanadu, the shadow of their wrought iron K motif falling upon him, and was conscious of how much he had changed since his last visit. In 1941, with an RKO contract to make a ground-breaking documentary about the Great American, he had stolen miles of footage in Xanadu as the Kane functionaries dismantled and inventoried the fortress's infestation-like collection. Statues, books, paintings, furniture, uncategorizable mementoes, jigsaw puzzles, phonograph records, vehicles, tapestries: all boxed or burned. Welles had felt that there was no waste as long as the process was caught on film. No gesture or moment was insignificant once processed by Gregg Toland's camera. Of course, he could not have foreseen that all his footage would end up like Kane's collection, listed and buried in a vault.

Up in the eaves of Xanadu, something with wings squawked, its cry like a jaguar's snarl played backwards.

Then, Welles had been slim and promising; now, he felt fat and thwarted. Charles Foster Kane Jr, a lifelong recluse crippled in the 1916 automobile accident that took his mother's life, had stirred the might of his inherited empire, and pressured RKO into abandoning *American*, just as they dissuaded *News on the March* from issuing its newsreel obituary. Junior, still nursing the hurt of his parents' divorce, acted as if he wanted the memory of Kane erased, working diligently at squashing biographies with all the zeal of an Egyptian priest wiping a dissolute pharaoh out of the history books. Now, in 1965, few people remembered whether Kane had been a real person or a made-up character. His name was sometimes good for newspaper sales – as when, in 1949, it had

seemed probable that an American black marketeer found dead in a Viennese sewer was the old man's bastard son – but mainly, he was as shadowy a concept as his "Rosebud," as forgotten a heap of detritus as his Xanadu.

Down the coast, a white spurt shot up. Part of the old Kane Estate was now leased to Cape Canaveral. Junior's passion was the sky, prompted by the cripple's hope that even if he could not walk he could fly. Welles remembered Junior's involvement with Howard Hughes' "Spruce Goose" during the War, and his establishment of a Kane Aviation Company in the '50s, diversifying into jet engines and prototypical rockets. Kane components would go to the moon one day, or bear the payload of man's final war. And Kane papers and television programmes would bear the news of both events.

Welles wondered again if the summons he had received was a hoax. Xanadu seemed from the outside to be completely deserted. Sun-bleached walls crumbled invisibly, and there was no sign of habitation. He looked back at the limousine, but the driver – half his face hidden by goggle-like glasses – betrayed nothing.

As young men, Kane and Welles had been much alike, the sleek and dynamic Boy Wonders of 1894 and 1940, but they had aged differently, Kane becoming a shambling, bullet-headed mammoth, shunned by the rest of the tribe, while Welles buried himself in beard, bloat and B-movies, squandering his theatrical reputation on cameo appearances and cheap magic tricks. It all started with *American*, the dream movie, to combine fiction and documentary in unprecedented ways. The footage had never even been edited together, but still *American*, the masterpiece that never was, cast its shadow over all Welles's subsequent, tidily completed but lesser-than-expected, works: *The Ambersons*, *Heart of Darkness*, *Don Quixote*, *The Trial*. If *American* had been finished, things would have been different. Welles would have been greater than Ford, than Hawks, than Hitchcock. Than Eisenstein, than Murnau, than Flaherty...

**F**inally, the gates were opened, and a thin, smiling man in a tropical suit led Welles to the house. The driveway was apparently unending, Xanadu growing larger with each step. Welles had heard of Dr John Montague before, had read his published account of his investigation into the notoriously haunted Hill House in Connecticut. That had ended in tragedy for one of Montague's researchers, but the scientist took care elaborately to exonerate himself in his book. Junior had commissioned the parapsychologist to look into his



own family's haunted mansion, perhaps to prescribe a rite of exorcism. Welles wondered why Junior hadn't simply had Xanadu burned to the ground, and its ruins seeded with salt.

Montague chatted as they walked to Xanadu, mainly about magic and trickery. Welles was known as an expert, having once sawn Rita Hayworth in half and capped the trick by marrying the girl. He had hoaxed the world that the Martians were coming. Montague assumed that the master magician would recognize a trick if he saw one. Welles realized there was something lacking in Montague, a failure to understand that magic was what you could not explain. That was its beauty, its trick. Probing the works, finding the concealed mirrors and strings, was the most effective method of exorcism.

The K above the door was weathered, most of its circle fallen away, leaving only a rind between the topmost arms of the letter. It looked like an R.

"Rosebud," Welles whispered.

Rosebud had proved the most overexplored false trail in American biography. The *News on the March* team had never found an explanation for Kane's last word, and neither had the would-be makers of *American*. Joe Mankiewicz, drunk, had suggested it was the mogul's private nickname for the private parts of his second wife, the former street corner diva Susan Alexander. That had been as good a solution as any.

Welles saw Montague's team in the grounds, blending in with the overgrowth like camouflage birds, prodding directional mikes and anemometers into various apertures. Montague talked about cold spots and ectoplasm and resonances. In the parapsychology texts, Xanadu had overtaken Borley Rectory, the Loren Home, the Frieburg Tanz Akademie, the Overlook Hotel and the Belasco Mansion as the world's most haunted house. Although Welles realized none of the rumours and reports that had filtered back to him had ever specified exactly *how* Xanadu was haunted.

Some excitement was caused among the psychic researchers by the siting of a large bird flapping lazily out of the eaves of the West Wing. The thing Welles had heard earlier, it looked like a vast, leathery bat with a horned swordfish's head. Montague explained the creature was a living fossil, but that no-one had got close enough to one to classify it. Welles remembered recreating some shots of Xanadu in miniature at RKO, reusing some of the back projection plates from *King Kong*. He wondered how the painted pterodactyl had migrated from Hollywood to Florida.

While Xanadu was decaying, the Kane Empire had been reshaping itself – Junior taking only a capricious interest, but capable men springing up from inside the business – and preparing for a war which, ultimately, would take it from the verge of bankruptcy to corporate heights to which Kane had never even aspired. Riding the tide of national purpose, Kane papers and magazines had re-established themselves as essentials in any American living room. In the '50s, Kane interests diversified: while Junior reached for the sky, his corporation crept into television, stealing a march on the competition as the new medium took hold on American life. Organization Men in gray flannel prowled the executive suites, as the name of Kane came to mean a many-headed but single-minded beast, almost independent of Junior, infiltrating America's living rooms. Kane papers backed and then denounced Joseph McCarthy, as if the old man's

ghost were still influencing editorial policies. Kane and Korea, Kane and Nixon, Kane and Kennedy, Kane and the astronauts. The old man would have loved the second half of the century more even than he had the first.

Montague listed the accomplishments of his team: trance mediums, physical mediums, psychometrists, psychotronics, psychokinetics. Ghost breakers in grey flannel, punching a time-clock and tuning in to the beyond just as his old audience had tuned in to the *Mercury Theatre of the Air*.

Even in his lightweight suit, Welles was perspiring uncomfortably. He was surprised, then, when Montague, on a doorstep as wide as an interstate highway, handed him a parka. The scientist pulled on a thick coat himself, and flipped the fur-lined hood up over his head. He looked ready to strike for the South Pole. Perplexed, Welles followed suit, wrapping the cumbersome garment around himself. He waited for the punchline, but none came.

Montague threw open the great doors of Xanadu, and stepped in. Welles followed, and was embraced by an invisible blizzard. As the doors slammed to behind them, he felt as if he had left the valley of Shangri-La and returned to Tibetan wastes. The scientist looked smug, and Welles tried to conceal his astonishment. Outside, was tropical heat. Here, within the walls of Xanadu, an arctic frost lay over everything. Welles asked if there was any scientific explanation. Montague didn't answer, but provided the information that Charles Foster Kane, born in 1864, spent his first years in a Colorado boarding house, coping with the fierce winters.

The statues and paintings were gone, but in their place were shaped blocks of ice. One of Montague's team was taking photographs of a swirling column that turned into a perfect Floradora Girl. The ice shifted and cracked as the girl performed a dance step with the grave dignity of a glacier.

The thick frost on the walls was shaped into dioramas. Welles was drawn to a screen-sized patch of sparkling ice. Street scenes turned into stage sets. The view crept up over houses and in through roofs. Welles wished he had a film crew with him. The ice pictures were the images he had dreamed of when he first conceived *American*. They melted and reformed in different configurations.

Montague stood back, and let Welles wander through the halls of Xanadu, constantly amazed, delighted and intrigued by the ice sculptures. The scientist was cool and cautious, not expressing an opinion. A lifelong measurer and tabulator, Montague was probably not even qualified to have an opinion.

Now Welles understood why the Kane people had sent for him. It was not that he could explain the ice sculptures, any more than he could explain "Rosebud." It was that he was the only one who could appreciate what was here.

The great staircase of Xanadu was thick with snow that came from nowhere and smoothed away the steps, fanning out around Welles' feet as it blanketed the parquet. The staircase was a slope suitable for skiing, for sledding. For an instant, as if a diamond bullet had pierced his brain, Welles thought he had an answer to the unanswerable. Then, like ice in the sun, it melted away.



# Waltzing Through the Genres

Rambo's creator David Morrell is interviewed by **Kim Newman**

**“M**y beginning as a writer,” claims David Morrell – adding “I suppose it’s rare to be able to put it so precisely in terms of time” – in an abandoned but Mozart-plagued hotel bar near the British museum, “was the first Friday in November of 1960 at 8.30 in the evening. I had turned on a television show that was then new, *Route 66*. It was about two young men in a Corvette sports car driving across the United States, ‘in search of America and in search of themselves.’ I was sixteen years old, and I fell in love with that show. I thought that it would be wonderful, not to be the actors but to be the man who had put the words into their mouths, because I enjoyed what they said so much. That writer’s name was Stirling Silliphant.”

Most pieces on Morrell make much of the contrast between the mild-mannered academic whose major scholastic publication is *John Barth: An Introduction* (1976), and the novelist of violence and intrigue who made an indelible impression with *First Blood* (1972) and followed through with a string of hard-edged, increasingly strange novels located within the thriller genre but constantly threatening to overspill category boundaries. His own account makes it clear that the academic experience – which, intriguingly, kicks in whenever he’s asked to discuss his own work and he starts thinking about it as he would if examining someone else’s *oeuvre*, seemingly surprised by the common themes and between-books progressions he finds – was always a stepping stone.

“I decided I’d go on to a college – I wound up getting a Ph.D in literature – the whole idea being that I learn about writing and at the same time have the time to do writing itself. When I was at Penn State getting my doctorate, William Tenn,



David Morrell

the first professional writer I’d ever met – a science-fiction writer, a brilliant man – taught me what writing was about. I did a number of short stories for him, in which I was imitating other writers. They were very bad and Tenn was very angry with

me. Finally he told me that I had to be myself and not like someone else, that I had to think about what made me unique, and for the lack of anything better, what was it that I was most afraid of. I sat down and I did a short story that involved a man who was out doing some target shooting



who discovered that someone else was in the forest with him and that that someone else had chosen our hero to be the target. This was back in the late '60s, before James Dickey's *Deliverance* was published, and really before a kind of genre that I helped to start, I suppose, got started. It was never published, but it was the first *David Morrell* story, and Tenn was pleased enough with it that he agreed to work with me more, and it was not long after that that I got the idea for *First Blood*.

"Meanwhile, I had gone from Penn State to teaching at the University of Iowa. There I was as a professor, teaching Faulkner and then going away and writing about Rambo. It was an odd dichotomy, and even though I've been successful as a writer I stayed as a professor until about 1986, when I resigned. I was getting to a point where having two full-time jobs was simply wearing me down. I loved the classroom experience, I enjoyed the students, but what I didn't like was the meetings and the papers I had to grade, things like that. At a certain point, I'd done this for sixteen years and that was sufficient. The way I usually put it is that teaching was my love and that writing was my passion, and that if there was a choice, I'd take the writing."

**A**lthough a novel that has come to be seen as central to a specific American experience, *First Blood* was written from a surprisingly detached point of view. "When I started writing it, it was 1969. I was born in Canada, I'd moved to the United States in '66. I didn't even know Vietnam was happening. I looked around and saw all these Americans so upset and learned about Vietnam and realized that this was the major story. Perhaps because I was a Canadian, I saw it from a slightly different perspective. I wanted to do a novel about pro- and anti-war attitudes focused around the idea of how would you feel about the war if it happened in your backyard. In that respect, I think *First Blood* is an anti-war novel, emphasized by the fact that Rambo dies at the end. There are no winners in the particular story, at least in the novel. It was certainly timely, but I didn't necessarily choose it because of that. I just saw the chance to do a strong thriller with a social undertone and what I

hoped were complex characters. As opposed to the films, which are a simplification."

Confronted with the the notion that Rambo has become an emblematic representation of the Vietnam veteran, as the characters of the film *The Best Years of Our Lives* or the "Lost Generation" figures of the '20s stand as embodiments of their own wars, Morrell is intrigued but cautious. "To my knowledge, *First Blood* was the first novel dealing with the plight of returning Vietnam vets. But most American soldiers who served in Vietnam did not see the kind of extreme combat somebody in a special forces unit would have. The kind of person Rambo is would be so highly trained, so unique compared to the mass of servicemen that, while most people coming back from Vietnam had some culture shock, only the people in the elite cadres could have extreme culture shock and develop what we call post-traumatic stress disorder. I wouldn't say Rambo is typical of Vietnam veterans returning and that *First Blood* is comparable to *The Best Years of Our Lives*, where the characters are not trained to the limits of human endurance.

"On occasion, some veterans' group will object to the films – most of them appear not to object to the novel – as depicting Vietnam veterans as being deranged. On the other hand, I in person have never had a Vietnam veteran who ever did anything but thank me for having written *First Blood*, because what I was expressing was what he had felt, and Sylvester Stallone told me the same thing, that the vets he had talked to all felt it was a positive portrayal. If you look closely at the film, the first one, Rambo is a very pacifistic character. There's a lot of shooting, but very few people get injured, as opposed to the book; the movie is war is heck, and the novel is war is hell. I have had wives of servicemen say that their husband never talked about Vietnam until after they'd seen the movie, and then it all came pouring out. It's a complicated thing, and we have the hero from the novel and the main character of the films. They're different interpretations of the same root."

**N**evertheless, Morrell concedes that his Rambo has become a part of popular culture. "It's interesting to me that the character delves so deeply into

what appears to have been a national consciousness that it entered the level of – I won't call it myth because that's a little too early to predict – but certainly of a folk hero. The new edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* has certified Rambo as a new word, and cites me and *First Blood* as the origin."

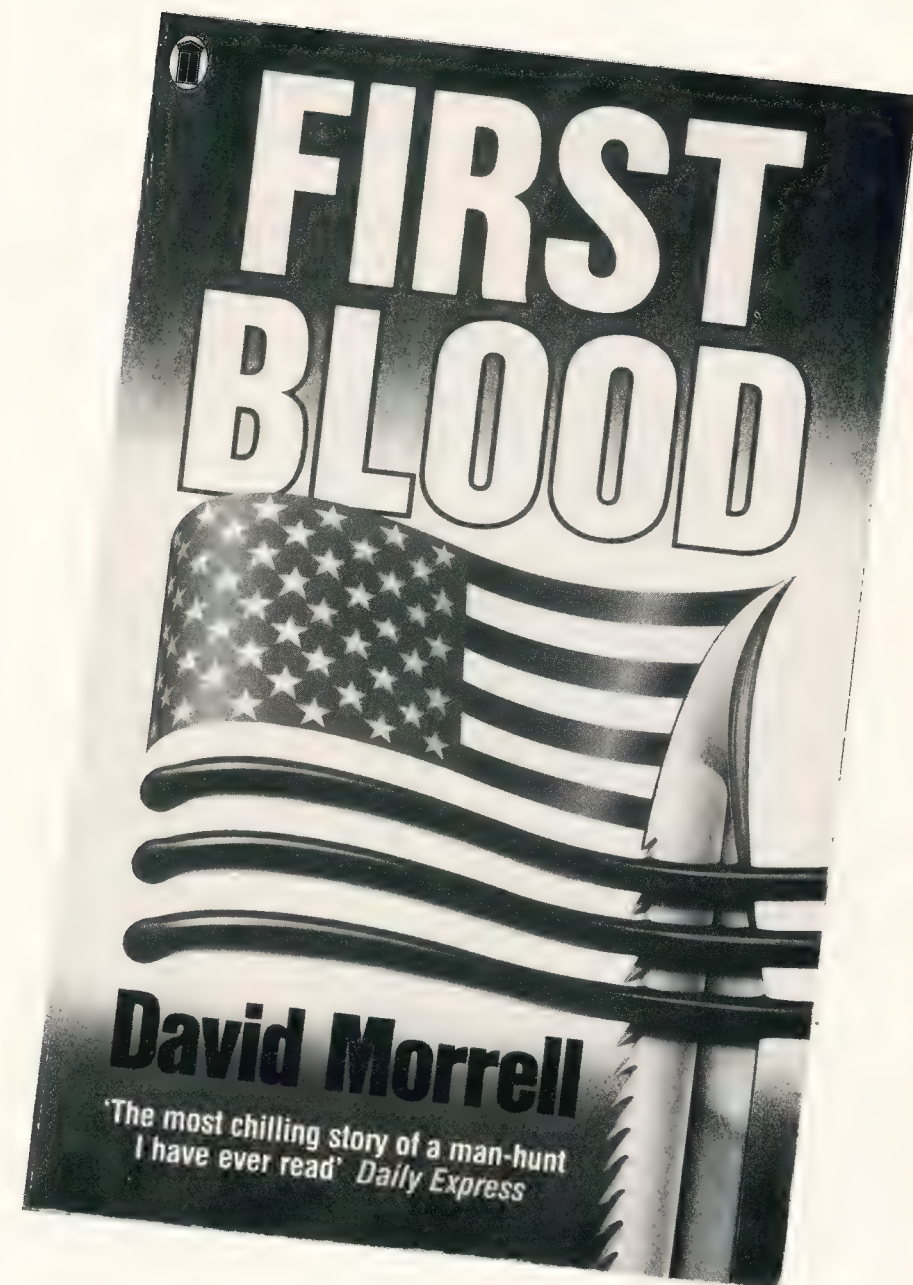
Ronald Reagan cited, jokingly, Rambo as an influence on his handling of international affairs, and the character has recently been invoked by Saddam Hussein and others, his image being singled out by anti-American protestors in Pakistan as especially worthy of despoliation as a symbol of US power. Morrell claims "it makes me nervous to a degree because often Rambo is used to be synonymous with the overuse of force, a kind of macho-ism, things like that, and I see Rambo as typical of a kind of dedicated, heroic, disciplined, selfless person. I find it amusing that it's used in terms of sports figures, and there it's used positively; while in politics, it's almost always negative. I can tell a person's politics by how they use the word."

Rambo's professionalism has carried over into Morrell's subsequent novels, which tend to deal with highly competent people pushed to the limits of their capabilities. "I'm interested in the idea of a professional, someone whose occupation and whose life are so closely combined that if they ever made a mistake in their professional life, they could get killed in their private life. A policeman, a soldier, a detective, a bodyguard as in *The Fifth Profession* (1990). They require a tremendous amount of control in the character. I make a distinction between professionals and amateurs in life. There are a lot of sloppy people in the world, people who don't pay attention to what they're doing, and mess up their relationships and mess up their jobs just because they're not taking care, as opposed to a professional who watches everything with great care, because there must be no mistakes. I'm fascinated by that notion, that a true professional has to maintain the discipline and control that there be no mistakes. I think of *The Fifth Profession* again, where the executive protector loses a client. It never happened to him before, a guy got killed, and our hero is just stunned at the mistake in a business where there can be no mistakes, and it fractures his personality."



Morrell is quick to point out that his career so far falls neatly into two periods, with a distinct change between *Blood Oath* (1982) and *The Brotherhood of the Rose* (1984). "Of the first five books – one of which hasn't been published in this country, *Last Reveille* (1977) – *First Blood* and *Testament* (1975) are chase novels, *Last Reveille* is a historical Western, *The Totem* (1979) is a horror novel, and *Blood Oath* is, um, I don't know, an adventure story. They're all short. They all ran about 300 pages in manuscript. My agent used to say I was waltzing through different genres, so why didn't I pick one thing and explore it? *Blood Oath* was originally twice as long, and when I got it back from my editor there were all these slash marks through it. What I'd done in trying to write a long book was add more words, and that's not what a long book is. A long book is more incident, and so what I did in the next book, *The Brotherhood of the Rose* – which is a kind of a breakthrough book for me in terms of getting bigger – was a book that was based on more incident. That manuscript was twice as long, the plot was very baroque. It's not just an international thriller, there are elements of horror in it, all kinds of genres. Ghosts appear in a spy story. I'm reminded of Dean Koontz, who moves back and forth through genres, and I like to do that too. After *The Brotherhood of the Rose*, I'd had so much fun with that book and I felt that I was progressing. I thought let's try a little harder, a little farther, a little deeper. I liked the results so much I wanted to do more like it, so the last five books have been big books, with complex plots and multiple characters, international settings, and I hope with themes that are big enough to match those characteristics."

*The Brotherhood of the Rose*, which was as destined to be a two-part TV miniseries as *First Blood* was to be a bigscreen action movie, was followed up by *The Fraternity of the Stone* (1985), a spy novel that tackled the dangerous subject of the Vatican's secret service, and *The League of Night and Fog* (1987), a joint sequel to the two earlier novels that, among other things, indicts the Catholic church for its at-best unhelpful actions during the holocaust. "I was raised a Roman Catholic, and I'm not trying to do



anything to the church," he claims. "I just find the church itself such a baroque institution, so byzantine and complex and with so much of its own gothic history, that it struck me as being a fun institution to introduce into my work, and at the same time to introduce the serious subject of how religion and how the things people do in the name of religion has been the major thrust in history from the very beginning. I come back to religion again and again. It's amazing to me, as I say in *The Fraternity of the Stone*, how much killing God seems to need, and one wonders how many One True Gods there can be in this world. I'm constantly addressing the issue of the intolerance and

murder and bloodshed that occurs in the name of religion."

Following up the trilogy with two loosely similar novels, *The Fifth Profession*, about bodyguards, and, the latest, *The Covenant of the Flame* (1991), a wildly speculative novel mixing political paranoia, ecological horror and gothic goings-on involving the Albigenian heretics, Morrell has continued to mark out his own territory on the map of the mass-market thriller. "One thing I do in my work which a whole lot of thriller writers don't do is the history. In *The Fifth Profession*, I wanted to summarize all Japanese history, not in a way that



was attempting to be exhaustive, but certainly in a way that would give people a better idea than most have about what the Japanese are about historically. Similarly, with *The Covenant of the Flame*, I did an enormous amount of work on a heresy which, if it hadn't been for Constantine, would have been the dominant religion in the Western hemisphere. It's fun for me to work into history. It adds to the mix. I wouldn't mind doing another historical novel, if I could find the right subject."

Although Morrell's current work fits quite comfortably on the shelf with Richard Condon, Frederick Forsyth and Robert Ludlum, he attacks his chosen genre with such verve that often a trace of the classical gothic wafts through the high action. "You gotta remember that there's this professor at work here. I studied so much literature and all the traditions of the gothic novel. It amazes me that most people who are fans of horror these days – and many writers of horror – don't know the traditions, they think it all began with Stephen King. When I'm writing I sometimes say that this is something Anne Radcliffe would have been proud of or what have you. It's useful to know what's been done. You can echo it sometimes, extend it sometimes. T.S. Eliot said you had to know everything that's come before in order to condense it and take one step farther on. I've been very much trying to do that. It's dif-

ficult to identify what I do. All I know is that if I say to myself 'gee this book is like such-and-such,' then I get very nervous and say I better back off and think again."

Indeed, his commitment to the gothic is most obvious in his highly-regarded short stories. "After each book I do short fiction, in the fantasy-horror field. I move from high action thrillers to horror, and alternate back and forth. I have in the drawer a supernatural horror novel that I've been working on, but I don't know when or if ever that will be finished because people who buy novels with my name on now associate me with high-action thrillers and my agent tells me I shouldn't confuse people. Damnable marketing gets in the way. One of these days I might do a horror novel, only do it under a small press in a limited printing, that way it wouldn't confuse the market. There's a version of *The Totem* which is twice as long, two-thirds different, and with a different style, which was in the drawer for a long time. I'm talking to some people about bringing that out in a limited edition. People could see another side of what I was trying to do.

"I'm incapable of eliminating the grotesque from what I write. In my work, there are moments when I say to myself, this is getting pretty far out, this is really strange, we're almost on the edge of insanity in some parts of this story. Should I hold it back? And I say, aw what the

hell, and at this point I usually end up laughing, not in derision but in fiendish glee because I know the reader is going to be stunned and shocked. My wife will come down and ask what I'm laughing at, and I'll say, oh you know I've just had these two guys see each other get their heads chopped off but they're both alive, so how can this be? That kind of demonic grotesqueness is something I think is unique to what I do. As I look through the thriller field, I don't see anybody else trying that sort of thing. Indeed, it's not as if I try, it's just what comes to me.

"Somebody said to me the other day, wouldn't you prefer to write realism, to write realistically? Now this is a loaded question because I think within the logic of the story that I produce, there is a kind of believability. You're running with these characters. If you stand back, it's far out, but within their twisted frame of mind it all makes sense, and you're with them. In that sense, I'd say the stories are realistic. One of the things that has been troubling me is that I think realism is essentially a kind of elite, highbrow writing that appeals to people whose lives are very comfortable, for whom reality is a very pleasant thing. My experience of reality has on occasion led me to believe that life is harsh and that novels should be a distraction from reality, an escape from reality, so I am a deliberately escapist writer, but that doesn't mean I'm not serious about what I'm trying to do."

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# Medical Mystery Tour

Robin Cook's medical thrillers are discussed by science journalist **Susan Aldridge**

I have been an avid consumer of hospital stories since the days of *Emergency Ward Ten* and teenage books like *Sue Barton – Student Nurse*. And although the sight of blood makes me squirm, my fascination with the world of the white coat has grown over the years. So I am grateful to Robin Cook MD for entertaining me with his series of high-tech medical thrillers from *Coma* (his best known which was made into a film of the same name in 1979) to his latest, *Vital Signs*, published here this June.

In *Coma*, which is set in the Boston Memorial Hospital (a venue to which Cook returns in subsequent books), a supply of donors for lucrative spare part surgery is ensured by some crafty replumbing of the anaesthetic gas pipes. *Vital Signs* looks at the brave new world of reproductive technology, through the eyes of a young woman physician who is unlucky enough to get involved in the nefarious practices of a crooked test-tube baby clinic. Cook's other novels explore a wide spectrum of topical medical and scientific themes: environmental pollution, genetic engineering, the drug industry, brain research and biological weapons.

Robin Cook, a graduate of Columbia University medical school, trained in general surgery and is now an eye specialist, currently on leave from the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary. He employs his professional knowledge to great effect in his books. One of the strengths of his writing is the attention to technical detail which he uses to build the sort of atmosphere in which the seeds of suspense flourish. In *Coma*, as the first victim fails to emerge into consciousness after minor surgery, we are made to feel the growing horror of the anaesthetist through the meticulous chronicling of his increasingly frantic attempts to revive her. Failed anaesthesia is a subject Cook likes



Robin Cook

to write about – evidently anticipating the queasiness it induces in the reader. It features in *Harmful Intent* (recently out in paperback) where both the anaesthetist and his patients are at the mercy of a psychopathic nurse, who is hooked on an ingenious game of Russian roulette, the consequences of which are described in harrowing detail.

Nor does Cook exactly gloss over the minutiae of all kinds of operations

and there is plenty of pathological action in the post-mortem room too. In fact, I can't help worrying that his descriptions of surgery might excite unhealthy ambitions among his readers. When the film *Paper Mask* (not a Cook story), about a hospital porter impersonating a surgeon, came out last year, one porter was reported to have "joked" that most hospitals have at least one such impostor on their staff. Come to think of it, I could probably make a



decent shot at a triple coronary bypass myself after the description of Dr Thomas Kingsley's macho surgical activities in *Godplayer*. And in *Brain*, the inordinately long descriptions of brain operations on a series of young female victims who are about to be picked off, *Coma* style, seem almost gratuitous in their detail.

Another of Cook's hallmarks is his liberal use of "techno-jargon" which generally works well in the context of building up the clinical atmosphere, but produces some bizarre effects in the mouths of key characters attempting to relate to each other. In *Mutation*, for example, this is Dr Victor Frank in conversation with his wife Marsha: "When I got the zygotes back here, I chose a nonsense sequence of DNA on chromosome 6 and did a point mutation. Then, with micro-injection techniques and a retroviral vector, I inserted the NGF gene, along with several promoters, including one from a bacterial plasmid that coded for resistance to the cephalosporin antibiotic called cephaloclor." As a child psychiatrist with no background in molecular genetics, Marsha's response is to start beating the hapless Victor with her fists, maybe in an attempt to mould him into a more believable character.

But Cook's writing can also be colourful, especially when he uses imagery and analogy to try to convey some of the wonder and mystery of life processes – often in a scene-setting prologue. Thus, in *Mortal Fear* he has us zoom deep inside the body of an unsuspecting victim moments before death – "The sudden appearance of the foreign proteins was the molecular equivalent of the Black Plague... the deadly new proteins were able to bind themselves to the repressors that covered the genes for the death hormone. From that moment, with the fatal genes exposed the outcome was inevitable." And here is his description of the sudden onset of the infertility which will lead inexorably to tragedy in *Vital Signs*: "The infecting bacteria came in a swift gush as if flushed from a sewer. In an instant, several million slender, rod-shaped microorganisms filled the lumen of the fallopian tubes. Most were grouped in small, tight clumps. They settled against the velvety convolutions of the mucosa, nestling in the warm fertile valleys, absorbing the abundant

nutrients and expelling their own foul excretions."

Cook's thrillers do not all deal with strictly clinical matters. *Outbreak* – for me, one of his most enjoyable books – explores the world of epidemiology where medical puzzles concerning the outbreak and spread of disease must be solved. We follow Marissa Blumenthal – who also appears as the main character in *Vital Signs* – in her struggle to contain and isolate the source of a mysterious series of outbreaks of deadly Ebola haemorrhagic fever. *Outbreak* was conceived and written not long after the first cases of AIDS were reported in the medical literature, and there are some interesting parallels with the real-life drama of the tracking of the HIV virus which show us how this vital branch of medicine works. And one of his early books, *Sphinx*, is not about medicine but about Egypt. It deals with the smuggling of antiquities and draws on the story of Tutankhamen's tomb for inspiration. Cook's life-long interest in Egyptology really comes over in this story with its lovingly detailed and sensuous descriptions of Cairo, Luxor and Egypt's holy places.

Cook's plots move fast, with most of the action being compressed into a few breathless days. This makes the books exhilarating to read. I don't think I've ever read any story as quickly as I read *Fever* – a classic race against time as researcher Charles Martel tries to save his young daughter from leukaemia caused by benzene pollution, in an incident reminiscent of the warnings of

Rachel Carson's classic ecology text *Silent Spring*. The breakneck pace allows Cook to get away with some weak subplotting though. *Mutation* for example, is peppered with frenetic activity on the sidelines which leads nowhere, except to convey that physicians in general, and Dr Frank in particular, work under pressure. In *Brain* there is a big build-up to an unpleasant little episode involving the highly sinister mortuary attendant whose relevance evaporated when I re-read the book at a slower rate.

It takes a writer of consummate skill to maintain the reader's empathy for the characters while moving through the storyline at such a speed. Most of Cook's characters are weak and stereotyped and are not given a chance to develop. Ironically, perhaps, the most memorable character he has created is his first, Susan Wheeler, the naive medical student heroine of *Coma* who impresses with her honesty and humanity. Cook tends to romanticize his women – his detailed physical descriptions are rather old-fashioned – but on the whole they are stronger than the men.

This weak characterization is frustrating, for Cook makes hospital politics a major theme in many of his books, providing some interesting psychological situations in which the characters could reveal themselves. In *Harmful Intent* for example, Jeffrey Rhodes comes under intolerable stress as the victim of a malpractice action. He stands to lose everything he cares about. I was looking forward to becoming enjoyably involved in his predicament, but somehow Jeffrey's responses didn't evoke my sympathy – like many of Cook's male medics he comes over as a shallow ditherer. And just as he shows signs of beginning to confront his inner contradictions, Cook whisks him off on a hectic chase around the underworld of Boston and we lose sight of his inner struggle. Something similar happens to Marissa in *Vital Signs*. As tension builds in her life – the agony of infertility, conflict between husband and career, development of an interesting relationship with a woman friend – the plot escalates too, forcing her to take off for Australia and Hong Kong with a string of gun-toting psychopaths in pursuit. Then there is Martin Phillips in *Brain*, one of Cook's more successful male characters, who is about

#### Robin Cook Bibliography

All published by Pan Books in paperback with the exception of *The Year of the Intern* which is published by Chivers Press as a New Portway Book on behalf of the Library Association.

*The Year of the Intern*, 1972.  
*Coma*, 1977.  
*Sphinx*, 1979.  
*Fever*, 1980.  
*Brain*, 1981.  
*Godplayer*, 1983.  
*Mindbend*, 1985.  
*Outbreak*, 1987.  
*Mortal Fear*, 1988.  
*Mutation*, 1989.  
*Harmful Intent*, 1990.  
*Vital Signs*, 1991.



to explore the reasons for his workaholic tendencies and failed marriage when he finds himself pitted against the system, racing against time down the squalid side streets of New York in the middle of the night.

**I**t would be interesting to know why Cook chooses to back off from exploring his characters in more depth, given that he makes no secret of having an aim other than sheer entertainment in his writing. *Coma*, for example, comes complete with a bibliography on spare-part surgery and the position of women in medicine. And in recent publicity for *Mutation* he voices concern over the lack of debate about genetic engineering. "If I wrote articles to try to get my concerns across, they would not be read," he says, "so I've elected to try to get my message across in an entertaining form." He really does seem to care about the future of medicine and goes on to say that "the unlikely marriage between medicine and business worries me."

If his books are evaluated from this perspective, then one has to look at how far he succeeds in informing the reader. As a scientist, I appreciate that he takes the trouble to get his facts straight. But the way he chooses to tell his stories – the black-and-white characters and the often simplistic plot lines – delivers a mixed message to the lay reader about the world of science and medicine. For example, *Godplayer*, which looks at power politics in medicine, is a portrait of cardiac surgeon Thomas Kingsley. Kingsley, we are told, feels an almost sexual thrill on holding a patient's heart in his hand in the operating theatre but cannot afterwards recognize the same man in the outpatient department. Though Kingsley's arrogance is absurdly overdrawn, the story is a powerful one and, I think, makes some telling points about modern medicine and the people who practice it.

But in *Mutation* the message is muddled in an obvious and rather silly plot which, if it conveys anything at all, merely plays into the hands of the anti-science lobby. Victor Frank, a molecular geneticist, attempts to enhance the intelligence of his son VJ by inserting extra copies of the nerve growth factor gene at the pre-embryo stage. The predictable result is a child with eyes whose "turquoise



depths were cold and bright as ice," who builds himself a giant underground lab at an age when most kids are just learning to read and by age ten is making pompous little speeches beginning "Morality cannot rule science because morality is relative and therefore variable..." One can only conclude that Cook's sense of humour – evident in a number of nice ironic touches in *Coma* – has completely deserted him. Gene therapy is, to quote a leading researcher in the field, "just around the corner" and Cook could have employed his considerable knowledge to conjure up any number of more plausible and imaginative scenarios than *Mutation*.

*Mortal Fear* is a far better tale of molecular genetics – dealing with the concept of ageing and death and touching again on the "playing God" theme. But *Mindbend* is another lost opportunity – because there have to be more ways of exploring the relationship between the drug industry and the medical profession without having to resort to the wholesale transformation of respectable GPs into drug-crazed zombies who lure women to an abortion clinic to supply foetal tissue for research. *Mindbend* opens promisingly enough with the dilemma of a young couple finding themselves expecting a child at just the wrong time, but once again the storyline is soon diffused into a melodrama which fails to engage.

**W**hether we view Robin Cook's work as light entertainment or something more, there is little doubt that his morbid attractions have earned him a niche and a popular following. There are, however, other writers worth reading who have made incursions into similar territory. *Mutation* has some of the same elements as Maureen Duffy's *Gor Saga* which was turned into a gripping TV drama (*Firstborn*). Medical laboratory scientist Andrew Puckett's second book *Blood Stains* was well reviewed by *New Scientist* and is a fast-paced thriller which looks at fraud within the blood transfusion service (the hero, like me, can't bear the sight of blood).

And American chemist Carl Djerassi has produced a more literary novel *Cantor's Dilemma* which is about rivalry and ambition in cancer research. Even established science journalist John Gribbin has found time to break into fiction with his racy *Father to the Man* which explores the controversy stirred up by a new theory about the origin of *homo sapiens*. Science and medicine are always in the public eye and they are the stuff of human drama. It remains to be seen if others will challenge Robin Cook for the title which the *New York Review of Books* has given him – "the master of the medical thriller."



# 100 Significant “Scientific Romances” (Published Prior to 1950)

In 1985 **David Pringle** wrote a book called *Science Fiction: The 100 Best Novels*. It consisted of short essays on 100 SF novels first published between 1949 (Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*) and 1984 (Gibson's *Neuromancer*). In 1990 a Spanish edition appeared from Ediciones Minotauro, Barcelona, and sold well. That edition is now due to appear in a second printing, and the Spanish publisher invited the author to add some new text. So what follows was written as an “appendix” to the 100 Best SF Novels...

**1. *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley (1818)**

The famous gothic novel by the daughter of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft (and wife of Percy Bysshe Shelley). About the creation of an artificial man, its many references to the sciences of the day allow us to claim it as a work of proto-science fiction.

**2. *Symzonia: A Voyage of Discovery* by Adam Seaborn (1820)**

The pseudonymous author was probably John Cleves Symmes, an American famous in his day for the notion that the globe is hollow with polar openings. The tale involves the discovery of a utopian society in this inner world. Symmes' hollow-Earth conceit influenced later SF writers, particularly Edgar Rice Burroughs.

**3. *The Last Man* by Mary Shelley (1826)**

This is Mrs Shelley's only other novel which may be regarded as an early work of science fiction. The “last man” of the title wanders a plague-stricken, depopulated future Europe.

**4. *The Science Fiction of Edgar Allan Poe* (1833-49)**

This collection, edited by Harold Beaver and published by Penguin Books in 1976, makes a convincing case for Poe as a writer of proto-SF short stories. Notable pieces include “The Unparalleled Adventure of One Hans Pfaall,” about a balloon flight to the moon, and “Mellonta Tauta,” a tale of the 29th century.

**5. *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* by Jules Verne (1864)**

Perhaps the first true SF novel. A German boy and his scientist uncle visit a vast underground realm by way of a volcano in Iceland. Verne's references to the sciences are copious, and he shows the influence of Poe.

**6. *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Round the Moon* by Jules Verne (1865-70)**

The two books constitute one long story in which intrepid spacefarers are blasted into a lunar orbit by a huge cannon (sited in Florida, which makes this work seem astonishingly prescient). The satirical tone of the first half also prefigures much later SF.

**7. *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* by Jules Verne (1870)**

The renegade Captain Nemo wages war on the British Empire by means of his wonderful submarine vessel. This is perhaps Verne's best “voyage extraordinaire.”

**8. *The Battle of Dorking: Reminiscences of a Volunteer* by George T. Chesney (1871)**

This novella about a future German invasion of Britain sold in large quantities and inspired many imitators. It is an outstanding work of “future realism” which undoubtedly influenced

H.G. Wells when he came to write *The War of the Worlds* 25 years later.

**9. *The Coming Race* by Bulwer Lytton (1871)**

The hero discovers an underground realm beneath Britain, inhabited by an advanced race of beings known as the “Vril-ya.” A popular and influential work by a writer who had previously been known for his fashionable novels and historical romances.

**10. *Erewhon, or Over the Range* by Samuel Butler (1872)**

The narrator discovers a utopian civilization which has a deep distrust of machines. This classic satire contains some interesting speculations on “machine evolution.” Butler's sequel was entitled *Erewhon Revisited* (1901).

**11. *The Mysterious Island* by Jules Verne (1875)**

One of Verne's most enjoyable works, this resembles *Robinson Crusoe* crossed with *The Tempest*. A balloon party are cast away on a Pacific island where (unbeknown to them) Captain Nemo lurks in his crippled submarine, the Nautilus. They set about building a miniature industrial society, with Nemo's scientific aid.

**12. *The Begum's Fortune* by Jules Verne (1879)**

Published in French as *Les cinq cent millions de la begum*. The wealth of an Indian potentate is devoted to the building of two rival utopian cities. Verne's faith in technological progress begins to waver and darken in this tale of conflict.

**13. *Across the Zodiac: The Story of a Wrecked Record* by Percy Greg (1880)**

One of the earliest British tales of interplanetary flight, this long novel concerns the hero's journey to Mars (by “anti-gravity” means which anticipate H.G. Wells's in *The First Men in the Moon*) and his discovery there of a polygamous society. The 1978 paperback edition which I possess is (perhaps mercifully) abridged.

**14. *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* by Edwin A. Abbott (1884)**

A slim satire narrated by a being from a two-dimensional world who calls himself “A. Square.” Full of mathematical conceits.

**15. *After London, or Wild England* by Richard Jefferies (1885)**

A beautiful book by a well known naturalist. It depicts the London area in the far future, after some vast cataclysm has caused the city to revert to nature.

**16. *The Clipper of the Clouds* by Jules Verne (1886)**

Published in French as *Robur le Conquerant*, this is something of a recension of *20,000 Leagues*... in aerial terms, with Robur



and his great airship taking the place of Nemo and the Nautilus. Verne's late sequel is called *Master of the World* (1904), and there has been a poor Hollywood film of the story under the latter title.

**17. *A Crystal Age* by W.H. Hudson (1887)**

A 19th-century man awakes in a pastoral utopia of the far future. It's not as attractive a book as *After London*, but it is notable for being the second anti-technological "scientific romance" to be written during the 1880s by a leading British naturalist.

**18. *Looking Backward: AD 2000-1887* by Edward Bellamy (1888)**

A sleeper awakes in the year 2000 and discovers that America has been transformed peacefully into an industrial utopia, full of steam-driven marvels. This was an immensely popular work which inspired many imitators.

**19. *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder* by James De Mille (1888)**

The eponymous manuscript is the narrative of a sailor who has found a lost world in the Antarctic – complete with dinosaurs, echoes of Symmes and Poe, and fore-echoes of Edgar Rice Burroughs's adventure romances. The author was Canadian, and the book was published after his death.

**20. *The Great War Syndicate* by Frank R. Stockton (1889)**

A future-war tale, involving super-weapons, by an American author who was a highly regarded short-story writer of his day.

**21. *A Plunge into Space* by Robert Cromie (1890)**

The hero and friends travel in a space vessel to Mars, where they find the standard utopian society. Dedicated to Jules Verne, this is notable only as an example of a "Vernean" scientific romance by a British writer.

**22. *Caesar's Column* by Ignatius Donnelly (1890)**

Of the many "answers" by American authors to Bellamy's *Looking Backward*, this was probably the most popular. Donnelly is tougher-minded than his predecessor, depicting a social polarization which leads to class war in the highly technological world of the late 20th century.

**23. *News from Nowhere, or An Epoch of Rest* by William Morris (1890)**

The narrator dreams of a future world transformed. The classic English socialist utopian novel, with a decidedly pastoral bias. Morris intended it in part as a riposte to Bellamy's more mechanistic *Looking Backward*.

**24. *Omega: The Last Days of the World* by Camille Flammarion (1893)**

First published in French as *La fin du monde*, this describes a scientifically advanced world of centuries hence which has a close encounter with a comet. Flammarion was a leading astronomer and science-popularizer, but his novel dissolves into mysticism towards its end.

**25. *The Angel of the Revolution: A Tale of the Coming Terror* by George Griffith (1894)**

Griffith was the most popular British scientific romancer of his day, though Wells was soon to eclipse him. In this military-political melodrama, an aircraft inventor becomes involved with anarchists, and a devastating futuristic war ensues. Griffith's sequel, published in the same year, was called *Olga Romanoff*.

**26. *A Traveller from Altruria* by William Dean Howells (1894)**

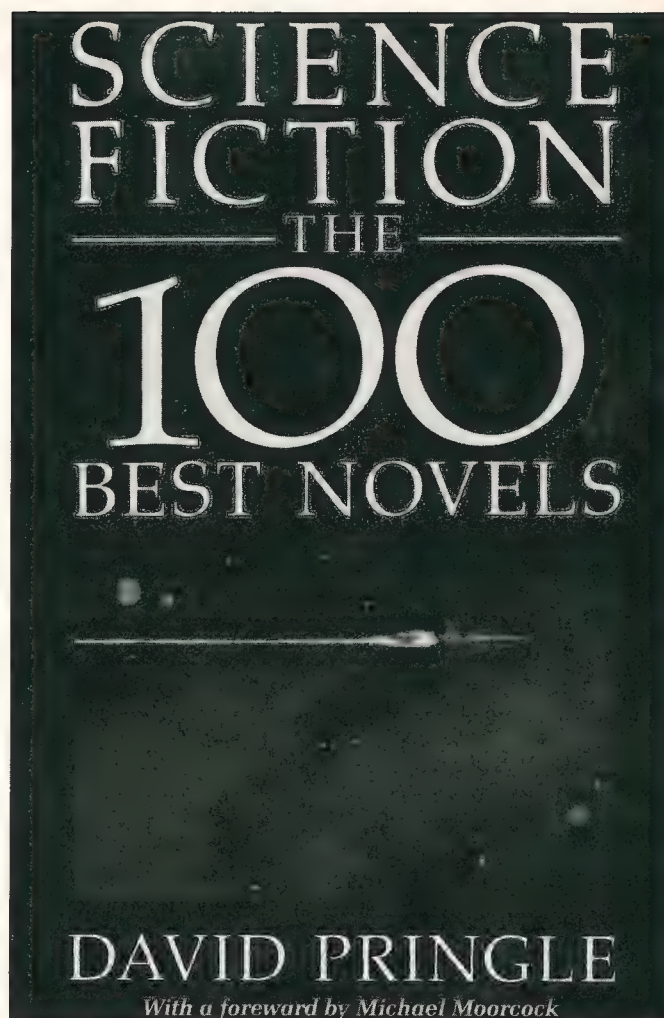
When a man from a perfect society visits contemporary America he is shocked by its evil ways. A thoughtful utopian romance by a well-known U.S. novelist, this book contributes to the debates on socialism, the future and machinery initiated by the fictions of Samuel Butler and Edward Bellamy.

**27. *The Ghost of Guy Thyrle* by Edgar Fawcett (1895)**

Few of us have seen this one, but Brian Stableford describes it as "an impressive early cosmic voyage" in his list of "The Ten Most Unjustly Neglected SF Novels Ever Written." The hero's disembodied consciousness crosses the universe, in a similar manner to that of Olaf Stapledon's narrator in the much later *Star Maker*.

**28. *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells (1895)**

The inventor of a time-travelling machine visits the far future,



where he finds a society divided into the decadent Eloi and the brutish Morlocks. Beautifully written, one of the greatest of all scientific romances.

**29. *The Island of Dr Moreau* by H.G. Wells (1896)**

A castaway on a remote island encounters the mysterious Dr Moreau and is horrified to learn of his experiments in turning animals into men. A Darwinian horror tale of considerable power.

**30. *Two Planets* by Kurd Lasswitz (1897)**

The Martians invade Earth, and help create a utopia. Very influential in Germany and throughout continental Europe, this long novel was not published in English until 1971 (when it appeared in abridged form).

**31. *The Invisible Man* by H.G. Wells (1897)**

A scientist learns how to make himself invisible, but the consequences drive him insane. This is a disturbing latter-day gothic which is much unhappier in tone than the various movies and TV series which have been based upon it.

**32. *The Story of Ab: A Tale of the Time of the Caveman* by Stanley Waterloo (1897)**

One of the earliest tales of prehistoric times, this book by an American author set the template for such later romances of the remote past as Jack London's *Before Adam*.

**33. *The Great Stone of Sardis* by Frank R. Stockton (1898)**

A fairly light-hearted futuristic adventure which involves the discovery that the Earth is in fact a gigantic gem-stone.

**34. *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells (1898)**

Tentacled Martians invade Earth and devastate parts of England with their heat-rays. An ironic vision of imperialism inverted, and one of the supreme masterpieces of the scientific romance; it has since been adapted to every conceivable medium (including an infamous American radio broadcast of 1938 which caused a real-life panic) and has gained a permanent place in modern mythology.



**35. *When the Sleeper Wakes*** by H.G. Wells (1899)  
Revised and reissued as *The Sleeper Awakes* in 1910, this tale of future revolution in a high-tech capitalist society is one of Wells's less successful novels – which still means that it's better than many of the other scientific romances listed here.

**36. *The Purple Cloud*** by M.P. Shiel (1901)  
One man survives a terrible poisoning of the Earth, and wanders, half-mad, through the deserted nations. With its mystical meditations and extravagant prose style, this more nearly resembles a supernatural horror story than a scientific romance proper – no wonder that H.P. Lovecraft admired it so.

**37. *The First Men in the Moon*** by H.G. Wells (1901)  
Two Englishmen travel to the moon in a sphere coated with the anti-gravity substance known as Cavorite. They discover an insect-like sub-lunar civilization. Another fine book by the greatest of all scientific romancers.

**38. *The Napoleon of Notting Hill*** by G.K. Chesterton (1904)  
A pointedly "anti-Wellsian" view of the future, in which the London of a century hence more nearly resembles the Middle Ages. Despite its future setting, it barely qualifies as SF.

**39. *The Food of the Gods*** by H.G. Wells (1904)  
Scientific research into super-food results in a race of human giants. A middle-range Wells novel, marred by a growing preachiness.

**40. *Lieutenant Gullivar Jones: His Vacation*** by Edwin Lester Arnold (1905)  
The hero journeys to Mars by magic carpet and rescues a Martian princess. A 1964 paperback reprint was retitled *Gulliver of Mars*, and it has been claimed that this colourful sf/fantasy influenced Edgar Rice Burroughs's much better known *A Princess of Mars*.

**41. *Before Adam*** by Jack London (1906)  
The best known of the American "caveman" novels (see Stanley Waterloo's *The Story of Ab* for an earlier example). A modern man's consciousness visits the remote past by mystical, atavistic means.

**42. *The Iron Heel*** by Jack London (1907)  
Of London's several scientific romances, this is the one in which he uses his sense of socialist outrage to best effect. The "Iron Heel" is a future capitalist dictatorship which bloodily provokes a successful revolution of the proletariat.

**43. *The House on the Borderland*** by William Hope Hodgson (1908)  
The house of the title is on the "borderland" between two worlds, or dimensions. This is basically a supernatural horror story with SF elements – notably, a cosmic vision in which the narrator's soul roams the universe. A short but powerfully imaginative and atmospheric tale.

**44. *The War in the Air*** by H.G. Wells (1908)  
The Germans launch an air war on Britain and America, and cockney hero Bert Smallways is caught up in its development. By far and away the most enjoyable of Wells's later scientific romances, alternating comedy with horrific visions of future devastation.

**45. *The Quest for Fire*** by J.H. Rosny (1909)  
One of many prehistoric tales by the Belgian writer who was perhaps the most popular scientific romancer in the French-speaking world after Jules Verne, this narrative of early human development was memorably filmed in 1982 by Jean-Jacques Annaud.

**46. *The Hampdenshire Wonder*** by J.D. Beresford (1911)  
A boy of vastly superior intelligence, possibly the first "super-man," is persecuted by normal folk. Beresford wrote one of the earliest critical studies of H.G. Wells's scientific romances, and shows that author's influence strongly in this novel.

**47. *The Lost World*** by A. Conan Doyle (1912)  
Professor Challenger and friends mount an expedition to a remote South American plateau where dinosaurs and cavemen still roam. A wonderful adventure story which has become one of the standard boys' books.

**48. *The Second Deluge*** by Garrett P. Serviss (1912)  
Water from outer space drowns the Earth, but the American

scientist hero helps rebuild society on the remaining high ground. Serviss's earlier scientific romances include the newspaper serial *Edison's Conquest of Mars* (1898), a gung-ho sequel to Wells's *The War of the Worlds*.

**49. *The Poison Belt*** by A. Conan Doyle (1913)  
Cosmic poisonous gas threatens the entire globe, and Professor Challenger and his associates (from *The Lost World*) devise a means of surviving it. Shorter and less satisfactory than the earlier novel, its ending is a bit of a let-down.

**50. *Darkness and Dawn*** by George Allan England (1914)  
First published in magazine form as three separate serials, this is one of the most notable examples of the American pulp scientific romance of the pre-Burroughs (and pre-Gernsback) period. A natural catastrophe strikes the Earth, but the stalwart hero survives a thousand years of suspended animation and then sets about rebuilding civilization almost single-handedly.

**51. *Herland*** by Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1915)  
Serialized in 1915 (but not in fact published in book form until 1979), this "lost" utopian romance is notable for its feminist vision. It describes a successful, functioning all-female society; and, in the past decade, it has become a highly regarded work, one which was well ahead of its time.

**52. *The Scarlet Plague*** by Jack London (1915)  
A plague destroys most of the human race, and the survivors are doomed to an eternal cycle of rise and fall. This novella has been reprinted, along with the author's other shorter scientific romances, in a volume entitled *The Science Fiction of Jack London* (1975).

**53. *A Princess of Mars*** by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1917)  
Originally serialized in 1912 as "Under the Moons of Mars," this is the perennially popular tale of swashbuckling Earthman John Carter, who finds himself magically transported to the red planet, known to its natives as "Barsoom." Hokum of a highly enjoyable type, it was followed by many sequels: *The Gods of Mars* (1918), *The Warlord of Mars* (1919), etc., etc.

**54. *When the World Shook*** by H. Rider Haggard (1919)  
Haggard's many lost-race novels such as *She* (1887) cannot really be claimed as scientific romances, but in this book he made his closest approach to the form. It concerns the discovery of an ancient "Atlantean" people living in suspended animation on a Pacific island.

**55. *A Voyage to Arcturus*** by David Lindsay (1920)  
More mystical fantasy than science fiction, this exceedingly strange novel by a British writer nevertheless involves a voyage to a far planet. Its admirers regard it as a masterpiece, and it had a large influence on such later authors as C.S. Lewis.

**56. *The People of the Ruins*** by Edward Shanks (1920)  
A despairing vision of a future Britain bombed into barbarism. As such, it represents a typical post-Great War response (in the UK) to the soured promise of technology.

**57. *At the Earth's Core*** by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1922)  
Originally serialized in 1914, this is a colourful piece of loincloth-and-dinosaur escapism in Burroughs's usual manner – but set in a Symmesian hollow earth which is reached via a boring machine or "mechanical mole." The author later wrote several sequels, including *Pellucidar* (1923) and *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* (1930).

**58. *The Absolute at Large*** by Karel Capek (1922)  
The Czech author had earlier coined the term "robot" (in his play *R.U.R.*, 1920). In this satire, matter-destroying machines inadvertently release the "absolute," or numinous principle, and cause a wave of religious mania.

**59. *Nordenholt's Million*** by J.J. Connington (1923)  
A plague devastates all the world's crops, and a strong leader organizes a group of would-be survivors. Notable for a rather malicious fictional portrait of H.G. Wells (who was clearly the inspiration for the novel). "J.J. Connington" was the pseudonym of Professor A. W. Stewart, who also wrote detective fiction.

**60. *The Clockwork Man*** by E.V. Odle (1923)  
I've never seen a copy, but according to Brian Stableford this little-known British tale of a man from the future who is con-



trolled by a clock-like mechanism is "the best scientific romance of the twenties."

**61. *Men Like Gods* by H.G. Wells (1923)**

One of Wells's late, somewhat cranky, utopian romances: an ill-assorted group of English folk find themselves in a parallel world of free love and social bliss.

**62. *The Land That Time Forgot* by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1924)**

Serialized as three stories in 1918 (and subsequently re-released in three paperbacks) this tale of a lost land near the South Pole contains some colourful but not very scientific speculation on biological evolution. It's very much a fast-action adventure story, though.

**63. *We* by Yevgeny Zamyatin (1924)**

The classic Soviet Russian dystopian vision, written in 1920 but suppressed in its author's own country and eventually published in France. It describes a horrifying future in which all citizens have numbers and live in glass-walled apartments, and in many of its details it certainly foreshadows Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

**64. *Ralph 124C41+* by Hugo Gernsback (1925)**

First serialized in Gernsback's *Modern Electrics* magazine in 1911, this tale of futuristic gadgetry is almost unreadable today, but it has historical interest as the first tale of "scientification" (Hugo Gernsback's own short-lived neologism) and hence as the immediate ancestor of all technophilic American magazine SF.

**65. *The Moon Maid* by Edgar Rice Burroughs (1926)**

Another escapist romp in Burroughs's usual manner, this one involves lunar travel and the conquest of the Earth. Like *The Land That Time Forgot*, it originally appeared as three magazine serials (1923-25) and has since been republished as two paperbacks.

**66. *Emperor of the If* by Guy Dent (1926)**

The scientist protagonist plays with various alternative timelines; and alters human reality twice over. I haven't seen this one, but Brian Stableford describes it as "a powerful and thought-provoking novel," and it certainly seems to have been one of the first of its type.

**67. *Deluge* by S. Fowler Wright (1927)**

A geological cataclysm drowns most of England in this grimly realistic narrative which became a surprise bestseller and was filmed in America. Wright's sequel is entitled *Dawn* (1929).

**68. *The World Below* by S. Fowler Wright (1929)**

This volume incorporates an earlier short novel of Wright's called *The Amphibians* (1925). The plot involves time travel to a far future world in which strange beings dwell. More far-out and extreme in its imaginings than Wells's *The Time Machine*, it is, alas, much inferior as a narrative.

**69. *Last and First Men* by Olaf Stapledon (1930)**

A history of the future which takes us from the 1930s to the last days of the 18th Men, almost two billion years hence. It's a colossal imaginative achievement by the most important British scientific romancer to follow Wells. The less grandiose sequel is entitled *Last Men in London* (1932).

**70. *Gladiator* by Philip Wylie (1930)**

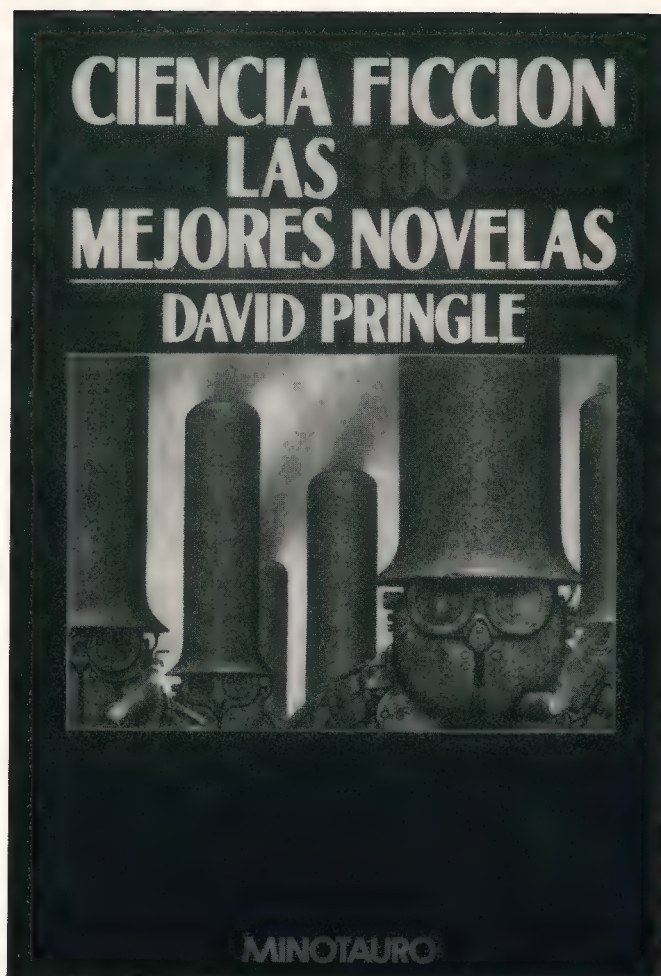
A "superman" story by a popular American writer, this novel concerns a boy who is endowed with great physical prowess. Although it's much more sober and realistic in tone, it almost certainly provided the inspiration for the comic-book Superman.

**71. *Brave New World* by Aldous Huxley (1932)**

The celebrated satire about a technologically stratified society some six centuries hence, which puts to good use its author's extensive knowledge of biology. Along with Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, it's one of the two best-known dystopian visions in English.

**72. *Three Go Back* by J. Leslie Mitchell (1932)**

A trio of modern folk are cast back in time to ancient Atlantis in the days when the Neanderthals still roamed. Of the three, the woman survives best. Mitchell was best known for his Scottish novels under the pseudonym of "Lewis Grassie Gibbon."



**73. *The Shape of Things to Come* by H.G. Wells (1933)**

Wells's last major scientific romance, it is perhaps best known through its memorable film version, *Things to Come* (1936). The original text (as opposed to the slimmed down version which Wells prepared to coincide with the movie) is a lengthy and rather stodgy history of the coming centuries, concentrating on technological war and post-war renewal.

**74. *When Worlds Collide* by Philip Wylie & Edwin Balmer (1933)**

A rogue planet is about to strike the Earth, but an enterprising few are able to plan their escape in a spacecraft. An exciting narrative which was continued in the same authors' *After Worlds Collide* (1934).

**75. *Winter's Youth* by John Gloag (1934)**

A treatment for longevity is achieved, but it causes social strife. Gloag was a British writer who wrote a number of scientific romances, and Stableford describes this one as "a sharp political satire."

**76. *The Strange Invaders* by Alun Llewellyn (1934)**

Degenerate human survivors in an icebound future world worship the gods of Marx and Stalin. Saurian monsters make their life even more insecure. Brian Aldiss commends this British novel, which he remembers fondly from his boyhood, and has written an introduction for a paperback reprint.

**77. *Land Under England* by Joseph O'Neill (1935)**

The hero penetrates deep caverns beneath Hadrian's Wall and finds descendants of the Romans presiding over a nasty totalitarian society. A tale by a British writer which may be read as a warning against fascism.

**78. *Odd John* by Olaf Stapledon (1935)**

Another superman tale, though more philosophical in tone than Wylie's *Gladiator*. It describes a supremely talented individual, born out of his time, who eventually founds a utopian community on a Pacific island.



**79. *War With the Newts*** by Karel Capek (1936)  
Capek's major satirical novel, written shortly before his death, concerns the discovery in the Far East of a race of intelligent newts. These creatures rapidly learn the ways of civilization and begin to take over the world.

**80. *Swastika Night*** by Murray Constantine (1937)  
In the 26th century the descendants of German Nazis rule the globe. A remarkable feminist and anti-fascist work by a pseudonymous author whose real name was Katherine Burdakin (the novel was republished under the latter name in 1985).

**81. *Sugar in the Air*** by E.C. Large (1937)  
Scientists invent a kind of "manna," artificial carbohydrates, but this nutritional bounty leads to commercial infighting. A well-written satire on the business culture. Like several other authors of British scientific romance, the author was himself a practising biologist.

**82. *To Walk the Night*** by William Sloane (1937)  
An American mystery novel which turns out to have a science-fictional rationale, involving an undercover alien. The author's second book, *The Edge of Running Water* (1939), is in a similar vein and both works have their admirers, particularly in the USA.

**83. *Star Maker*** by Olaf Stapledon (1937)  
The narrator's disembodied consciousness is whisked away on a grand cosmic journey of awe-inspiring scope. Attempting to portray the progress of all intelligent life in the universe over a period of billions of years, this work is even grander in scale than the author's *Last and First Men*.

**84. *Out of the Silent Planet*** by C.S. Lewis (1938)  
The hero is taken to Mars aboard a spacecraft and encounters wise spiritual beings who inform him that Earth is a fallen world. An atmospheric scientific romance which is also a religious allegory and, specifically, a riposte to the ideas of Wells, Stapledon and scientist J.B.S. Haldane.

**85. *The Hopkins Manuscript*** by R.C. Sherriff (1939)  
The moon falls to Earth, causing a catastrophe of immense proportions. By a well known British playwright and screenwriter, the book implicitly attacks complacency in the face of looming world war. It has been republished in paperback as *The Cataclysm*.

**86. *The New Adam*** by Stanley G. Weinbaum (1939)  
One of the first novels by an American magazine science-fiction writer to reach book form (although he had died in 1936 and this work was posthumous). It concerns the life of a highly evolved man in contemporary society, and bears some resemblance to Stapledon's *Odd John*.

**87. *The Twenty-Fifth Hour*** by Herbert Best (1940)  
A little-known example of an American post-disaster novel. Following war and plague, a few survivors attempt to rebuild civilization along cleaner lines in Egypt.

**88. *Lest Darkness Fall*** by L. Sprague de Camp (1941)  
The hero is thrown back in time to ancient Italy during the twilight of the Roman Empire, and decides to change the course of history by introducing modern technology. An ingenious work by one of the new magazine science-fiction writers, it's clearly influenced by Mark Twain's 19th-century fantasy classic, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*.

**89. *The Glass Bead Game*** by Hermann Hesse (1943)  
By a German/Swiss Nobel Prize-winning author, this futuristic fantasy is one of a kind: about a utopia which is held together by a complex system of intellectual and artistic game-playing. A difficult work, it has also been translated into English as *Magister Ludi*.

**90. *Perelandra*** by C.S. Lewis (1943)  
A sequel to *Out of the Silent Planet*, in which the hero of the earlier novel is taken to Venus, where he participates in a reenactment of the Fall. It has been reprinted in paperback as *Voyage to Venus*. More overtly religious and fantastic than its predecessor, it was followed by a third novel in the sequence, *That Hideous Strength* (1945), which can scarcely be classed as a scientific romance.

**91. *Sirius: A Fantasy of Love and Discord*** by Olaf Stapledon (1944)

A dog with scientifically enhanced intelligence falls in love with a human girl. A remarkably moving narrative which deals in miniature with Stapledon's characteristic concerns about the fate of intelligence in an icy, uncaring universe.

**92. *Star of the Unborn*** by Franz Werfel (1945)  
A lengthy "history of the future," with utopian and cosmic-voyage elements and mystical overtones. It was written during the last years of his life by the Austrian author who is best remembered for his novel *The Song of Bernadette* (1941).

**93. *Mr Adam*** by Pat Frank (1946)  
Thanks to an atomic accident, all men save one are rendered sterile. An amusing satire by an American author (real name Harry Hart) who subsequently wrote several more novels on subjects related to the nuclear bomb.

**94. *The Skylark of Space*** by E.E. Smith (1946)  
First published as a magazine serial in 1928, this jolly adventure romp has no literary merit but deserves mention as being perhaps the first interstellar epic. As such, it was an extremely influential work (the *Star Wars* tradition begins here).

**95. *The Time Stream*** by John Taine (1946)  
After World War II, SF novels by American magazine writers began to appear regularly. This complicated tale of time travel is another such, based on a 1931-32 serial, and it is possibly the best example of the author's work (born in Scotland, his real name was Eric Temple Bell).

**96. *Slan*** by A.E. van Vogt (1946)  
Serialized in 1940, van Vogt's action-packed first novel became one of the popular "classics" of magazine SF. It concerns the adventures of Jommy Cross, telepathic superhero, in a future world where his kind, known as Slans, are hunted down mercilessly.

**97. *Doppelgangers*** by Gerald Heard (1947)  
This dense dystopian tale, packed with ideas ranging from the scientific through the psychological to the mystical, was written by an English author, friend of Aldous Huxley, who emigrated to America (where he was known as "H.F. Heard" and is best remembered for his detective novels).

**98. *Greener Than You Think*** by Ward Moore (1947)  
An artificially mutated strain of grass overruns the world, in this amusing first novel by an American author who went on to contribute to magazine SF in the 1950s.

**99. *Ape and Essence*** by Aldous Huxley (1948)  
Huxley's second scientific romance (or third, if one counts his excellent 1939 novel *After Many a Summer*) is a tale-within-a-tale. A Hollywood scriptwriter tells a bleak and timely story of life in California after a nuclear war.

**100. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*** by George Orwell (1949)  
The world-famous work with which my 1985 list of the Hundred Best SF Novels began. I described it there as "a Janus of a book, facing two ways: it is both a culmination of the British scientific romance, and a source book for much of the science fiction which has followed."

(With thanks to Brian Stableford, whose knowledge of the scientific romance is unrivalled anywhere. In particular, I am indebted to his book *Scientific Romance in Britain, 1890-1950*, 1985; and to his "The Ten Most Unjustly Neglected SF Novels Ever Written," printed in Jakubowski and Edwards, eds., *The Complete Book of Science Fiction and Fantasy Lists*, 1983.)

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# Mutton Dressed as Lamb

## Toby Young

Last May and June, you couldn't leave your house without seeing a cannibal on every street corner. Hannibal Lecter, the serial killer played by Anthony Hopkins in *The Silence of the Lambs*, stared at you from virtually every magazine on the newstand. It was tempting to attribute the buzz about this film to the media skills of those involved, but no amount of PR could generate that kind of heat. In America it has become the most successful film of the year, taking over \$100m at the box office. But it's the critical plaudits which made it so talked-about. *The Silence of the Lambs* was that increasingly bankable commodity, mass culture acclaimed as art.

Films, novels, records, anything which falls into this category inevitably attracts attention. Think of all the hoo-ha which greeted *Presumed Innocent*. We applaud artists who manage to create something deep and disturbing from such unpromising material, as if they'd pulled off some conjuring trick. There's felt to be something particularly resonant about their work, something revealing about the way we live now. Jonathan Demme, the director of *Silence*, described it as "a very accurate visualization of Bush's soulless America" and the critics agreed with him. That sort of thing used to be said about Jackson Pollock paintings, not slasher movies. At Cannes this year the Palme d'Or was awarded to *Barton Fink*, a Hollywood comedy. Mass culture has become the new avant garde.

There's something a bit suspect about this. Classically-trained, European filmmakers like Paul Verhoeven, director of *RoboCop* and *Total Recall*, don't make sci-fi action thrillers because they have any genuine regard for the genre. Mass culture appeals to them because it's so trashy. Like Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein, they see it as providing the material for a naive, popular art. The agenda behind this may be to challenge the traditional elitism

of the arts, but the implication is that in its primitive, unreflective state, mass culture doesn't have any artistic worth. It only becomes valuable when it is transformed by the artist's magic wand.

This was implicit in the recent success of *Twin Peaks*. It was hailed as an intelligent soap, popular television at its best, but its intelligence largely took the form of distancing itself from other soaps. Its nudge nudge, knowingness about the conventions of the genre, the fact that it didn't expect you to be drawn in by the usual devices but to laugh at their crudity, assured its audience that they were above such things, too intelligent to be taken in by schlock television. Similarly, we were asked to marvel at the surrealism of small-town American life, its goofy, unintended aesthetic, thereby adding to our sense of superiority. *Twin Peaks* did occasionally have a kind of gaudy lyricism, but most of the time it seemed to be inviting its sophisticated, metropolitan audience to snigger at the gaucheness of mass culture, to laugh at its naivety.

The same attitude is evident in the praise lavished on films like *Silence*. The filmmaker is always congratulated for overcoming the limitations of his milieu, like some tycoon who has pulled himself up by his bootstraps. Far from honouring mass culture, such praise treats it as something which has to be overcome, like a handicap. Its ghetto status is maintained by elevating its most accomplished products to a more respectable cultural bracket. The implication is that it is generally rather coarse and dirty, something less than art.

What all this illustrates is that the critical acclaim which certain aspects of mass culture have been receiving reflects the pitifully low esteem in which most of it is held. It seems incredible that after a century of extraordinary creative development mass culture is still regarded as junk by most educated people. This is

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particularly true of America, where you'd expect them to be less snobbish. At Harvard, films like *Cyrano de Bergerac* run for months at the Dunster Street Cinema, but if you want to see *Predator II* you have to join a film society. The notion that something from Hollywood, something non-European, could have any artistic merit – laughable! Even the most distinguished practitioners of mass culture seem to share this view. Ben Hecht, the screenwriter who worked on *Scarface*, *The Front Page*, *His Girl Friday* and *Notorious*, said, "The movies are one of the bad habits that corrupted our century, an eruption of trash that has lamed the American mind and retarded Americans from becoming a cultured people."

Part of the reason for its bad reputation must be its close association with commerce. Products intended for the mass market are not created under conditions designed to favour individual artistic expression. They're designed to make money. Hollywood studio chiefs are more concerned about holding down their jobs for the next six months than making films which will be remembered for the next two hundred years. There's a widespread feeling that art should be difficult and inaccessible, the opposite of a best-seller or a hit movie. Artists who compromise their vision to make it more commercial are "sell outs." The myth of Van Gogh casts a long shadow over our understanding of art in this century. We find it difficult to believe in an artist who can take



a meeting and read a balance sheet. Creative people are supposed to live in garrets, not Beverly Hills.

Yet it's ridiculous to think that no great artist ever did it for the money. Jeffrey Archer may have become a writer to pay off his debts, but then so did Walter Scott. It's possible for something to be created for the most mercenary of motives and still be memorable. Machiavelli wrote *The Prince* in order to ingratiate himself with Lorenzo de Medici and Mozart was considered a hack in his day. Just because something's popular doesn't mean it's good, but it doesn't mean it's bad either. Is John Updike a worse writer than Jilly Cooper because *Couples* sold more copies than *Riders*? If Shakespeare was alive today it's not inconceivable that he'd be working in Hollywood (and if he wrote a Mel Gibson picture it would be *Lethal Weapon* not *Hamlet*). Freud said all artists were motivated by three things – money, fame and beautiful lovers.

Still, there's a sense in which something pitched at a mass audience will not produce the same emotional response as something more high-brow. The feelings aroused by a Hollywood blockbuster or an international bestseller are inevitably much coarser than those evoked by a Chekhov play or a Beethoven sonata. We're conditioned not to pay any attention to such gaudy emotions, to regard them as cheap and untrustworthy. We may end up with tears rolling down our cheeks, but we're unlikely to be moved, at least not in a way we attach much importance to. Mass culture affects us at a much earthier level. There's something indelicate and crude about it, it gets us in the gut rather than the heart. Even the best popular art can seem shallow and insignificant next to the classics. It has a pulpy, sensationalist feel, a bastardized version of the real thing.

But it's this unlettered, vulgar quality which makes it so appealing. If it was any more respectable it would lose its irreverent wit and rum-bustious energy. At its best, popular culture has a rebellious, iconoclastic aspect, it cocks a snook at the accepted wisdom of the day. Whenever it tries to be wholesome or correct, as in public-service television or Sting's music, it becomes dreary and boring. Its true spirit is embodied in things like Stephen King novels and

Clint Eastwood films. Mass culture may offend against good taste, it may not be as refined and cultivated as our official culture, but that's what's good about it. As Pauline Kael says about movies, "The well-spring of their art, their greatness, is in not being respectable."

That's why so much contemporary criticism misses the mark. There is a tendency, particularly among American critics, to scrutinize mass culture for signs of racism or sexism, as if the most important thing about it is how politically correct it is. *The Silence of the Lambs*, for instance, was criticized by the *Village Voice* for including a stereotyped "psycho queer." But if the popular arts never offended anyone, if they displayed the same sensitivity as a media-wise politician, they would lose all their vitality. You only have to read one of the new breed of feminist detective thrillers to realize how dismal mass culture can be. It's precisely because it isn't hamstrung by these considerations that it's a source of such pleasure.

In the end, it's the need to preserve this unofficial, out-of-school quality which is the best reason for not treating mass culture as art. The word "art" carries an air of refinement, a certain respectability, which isn't entirely welcome. It conjures up images of museums and galleries, hardly the best places to appreciate popular culture. It robs it of its carnivalesque spirit, turns it into something more high-minded. It puts you in mind of those cine-astes who talk about a director's "technique" and like nothing more than a ten-minute "tracking shot." The French critics who invented the *auteur* theory seemed to need to distance themselves from the ordinary experience of film, as though simple entertainment wasn't enough. But mass culture doesn't need this kind of defence; the pleasure it gives is nothing to be ashamed of.

On the other hand, this doesn't mean its practitioners should be regarded as "bright technicians," to use Gore Vidal's phrase. The fact that something isn't in the same class as de Vinci doesn't mean it's junk. What we need is a way of paying tribute to mass culture which doesn't threaten its low-brow reputation, a way of acknowledging its value without making it respectable. The best way to achieve this is to be attentive to our experience, to describe what

we enjoy. We can applaud something's inventiveness and originality, while not forgetting that its primary purpose is to entertain, just as we can be conscious of its sensationalism, without denying its intelligence. Mass culture shouldn't be put on a pedestal, but it shouldn't be dismissed out of hand either.

(Toby Young)

## PHILIP K. DICK CELEBRATION

Two PKD enthusiasts, community worker Jeff Merrifield and actor John Joyce, are currently putting together a celebratory weekend around the life and work of Philip K. Dick. This is to take place at Epping Forest College in Loughton, Essex, over the weekend of 19-20 October 1991. The initial response to the idea has been incredible and the programme is growing daily.

Already committed are Ken Campbell, who will be delivering the opening address and presenting some enlightening personal insights; Dr Ernesto Spinelli, who will shed some light on the phenomenological nature of Dick's work; the writer John Constable, who will be using *A Scanner Darkly* to focus on drug uses and abuses; Brian Stableford and Maxim Jakubowski, who will lead a discussion on the mainstream novels; Philip Strick, who will look at Dick's growing influence on the cinema; and Brian Aldiss is cooking up "something special."

There will be a number of theatrical elements to the weekend. John Dowie will be performing his celebrated one-man play based on Dick's writings, "Take Them to the Garden," and John Joyce will perform his much acclaimed version of the famous "Metz Speech." John is also working on a new piece "What is Human?" that draws on PKD's writings around the Human/Android theme, with follow-up panel discussion. Actress Suzan Crawley is working on a piece based around the way females are presented in Dick's work.

Paul Williams will be guest of honour. Paul is the literary executor of the PKD estate and both knew and has written extensively about Philip K. Dick. For many years he has administered the Philip K. Dick Society and Newsletter.

Registration fee for the weekend is £13.50. There is a limit of 300 places, of which 100 are being set aside for members of the PKD Society. To make sure of your place send your name, address and £13.50 off to the address below, but do it quickly – interest is growing. Bed and Breakfast in *en suite* rooms will be about £30 to £50 per night, depending on whether you want single rooms or will share in a twin. This includes bussing, and the organizers will make the arrangements for you. You will get a detailed information pack with your registration documents.

Applications to CONNECTIONS, Epping Forest College, Borders Lane, Loughton, Essex IG10 3SA, UK.



# Ernest Bramah: Crime and Chinoiserie

The creator of Kai Lung and Max Carrados is celebrated by  
**David Langford**

**T**here are plenty of long-dead authors whose names mean nothing to that dreadful entity the Reading Public, but whose works are still cherished by a self-selected few. Not so many authors have scored this "cult" success twice over in two separate genre categories. Ernest Bramah is one such.

The usual details: he was an English recluse, his full name was the less striking Ernest Bramah Smith and he lived from 1868 to 1942, when the *Times* gave him eight column inches of obituary. With his left hand he produced the once very popular mock-Chinese tales of the storyteller Kai Lung, and with his right the celebrated (in crime-fiction circles) cases of Max Carrados, that omniscient though blind detective.

**K**ai Lung came first. *The Wallet of Kai Lung* crept imperceptibly into print in 1900; like all Bramah's best work it consists of short stories. In this series they're normally fantastic tales related by the itinerant Kai Lung in an exceedingly mannered "Chinese" idiom. (As regretfully noted in *The Listener's* 1947 retrospective article on Bramah, it seems pretty certain that he never left Europe, let alone visited China.) Occasionally the teller is dispensed with, but the voice remains the same.

An archetypal example is the first story "The Transmutation of Ling," a novella filling more than a third of this book. Kai Lung appears in a simple framing narrative: captured on his travels by the dread brigand Lin Yi ("I am indeed Lin Yi... It is a dignified position to occupy, and one for which I am quite incompetent"), he has insufficient cash to placate the robber band and instead must soothe them with the ornate story of Ling.

Ling's adventures are distinctly

uneven. Aspiring to the civil service via the traditional Chinese route of public examination (of which Bramah makes repeated and increasingly satirical use), he is assigned much against his will to lead a venal defence force of archers:

Should the enemy be undisconcerted by the cloud of arrows, and advance, the bowmen are instructed to make a last endeavour to frighten them back by uttering loud shouts and feigning the voices of savage beasts of the forest and deadly snakes.

Inevitably Ling is laid low by a traditional corrupt Mandarin and the inflexible toils of bureaucracy: when the Emperor approves a false report of his cowardly death, the Imperial Vermilion Sign on this document quite outweighs Ling's trifling claim to be alive. In despair he attempts suicide with a potion which turns out to be the single existing dose of a magical elixir of wealth... the result being that bits of his person, when detached, turn to gold.

His own interests would have been better secured had the benevolent spirits who undertook the matter placed the secret within his knowledge in such a way as to enable him to administer the fluid to some very heavy and inexpensive animal...

This ushers in new and substantially sillier complications, with Ling regaining solvency by raising money on his prospect of becoming, posthumously, a large mass of gold. A dodgy entrepreneur duly floats him as The Ling (After Death) Without Much Risk Assembly, and until our hero finally regains the upper hand his life is made very awkward by contractual small print forbidding any actions liable to reduce his post-mortem value by loss of weight, taking the slightest risk of death *except* when the body could not possibly be mislaid, etc.

**T**he peculiarly addictive quality of this chinoiserie lies not so much in plot as in the unwaveringly artificial prose style. Formal politeness and elaborate diction are maintained in the most extreme circumstances, to hilarious effect. Bramah had impressive resources of vocabulary, circumlocution and euphemism, and could always find another and more ludicrous way of putting a commonplace sentiment: parodists have pulled their own heads off rather than sustain his remorseless flow for more than a few paragraphs. Meanwhile, a real fondness for mythic China shines through.

*Kai Lung's Golden Hours* (1922, with an enthusiastic introduction by Hilaire Belloc) perhaps contains the best of the stories. Certainly it has the best of the one-liners, and when Bramah fans exchange favourite phrases (which they are apt to do at great length), most are traceable to this volume. It is closely rivalled by *Kai Lung Unrolls His Mat* (1928). Both have overall framing narratives which have enabled publishers to pass them off as novels, featuring Kai Lung and his lady love Hwa-Mei versus the wicked but ever-smooth Mandarin Shan Tien and his despicable accomplice Ming-Shu... who is celebrated in such chapter titles as "The Malignity of the Depraved Ming-Shu Raises Its Offensive Head" and "The Degraded Persistence of the Effete Ming-Shu."

Through most of *Golden Hours* Kai Lung takes the role of Scheherazade, staving off Ming-Shu's malignity by appealing to Shan Tien's weakness for refined narrative. He has a story for any occasion, and knows exactly what each audience prefers: The prosperous and substantial find contentment in hearing of the unassuming virtues and frugal lives of the poor and unsuccessful.



Those of humble origin, especially tea-house maidens and the like, are only really at home among stories of the exalted and quick-moving, the profusion of their robes, the magnificence of their palaces, and the general high-minded depravity of their lives.

The ironic tone is now well established. On page one the storyteller first encounters Hwa-Mei and her duenna, and bows:

At this display the elder and less attractive of the maidens fled, uttering loud and continuous cries of apprehension in order to conceal the direction of her flight.

Bramah is never at a loss for gallant phrases to describe his Oriental beauties (who in the inset stories tend to be far more competent and resourceful than their often wimpish heroes):

After secretly observing the unstudied grace of her movements, the most celebrated picture-maker of the province burned the implements of his craft, and began life anew as a trainer of performing elephants.

One would have expected this style to be a straitjacket, but somehow it never quite is, even when unrestrained cursing is heard from the lowly artisans of the Harmonious Constellation of Paste Appliers and Long Brush Wielders after someone has been tearing down their posters:

"May bats defile his Ancestral Tablets and goats propagate within his neglected tomb!" chanted the band in unison. "May the sinews of his hams snap suddenly in moments of achievement!"

This narrative tone also adapts itself to a few grim and bitter stories which lurk alarmingly among the sweetmeats. Even in sunnier tales there are frequent snippets whose implications are not so jolly:

The manner by which he gained his livelihood consisted in leading a number of blind mendicants about the streets of the city and into the shops and dwelling-places of those who might reasonably be willing to pay in order to be relieved of their presence.

Alas, this play fails thanks to the activities of a far less pacifistic protection-racket operator, after whose violent depredations the shopkeepers can only explain apologetically

that "an insatiable sponge has already been laid upon the well-spring of our benevolence and the tenacity of our closed fist is inflexible."

In Chinese mode, Bramah is rewarding but should perhaps be taken in small doses, one story or chapter before bedtime to prevent over-exposure. There is a fourth, slightly inferior collection, *Kai Lung Beneath the Mulberry Tree* (1940) and – amazingly – a complete novel "related by Kai Lung," *The Moon of Much Gladness* (1932). This last is definitely too much of a good thing; the anachronistic jokes sometimes found in the short stories here take the form of gags about Western ("barbarian") detective stories, and indeed a great deal of the book is detective pastiche. What appalling fiend, later dubbed "Wang the Invisible Shearer," cut off the illustrious Mandarin's pigtail in the very nearly locked room? Never mind.

Meanwhile, in another part of the wood...

**T**he tales of Max Carrados lie squarely in the classic English detective tradition, told in plain though polished prose: *Max Carrados* (1914), *The Eyes of Max Carrados* (1923) and *Max Carrados Mysteries* (1927). An odd Carrados story found its way into Bramah's collection of detective japes and spoofs *The Specimen Case* (1924), and again there's a novel: *The Bravo of London* (1934), a disappointing performance whose most memorable section turns out to be a recycling of one of the short stories.

But those three main collections are full of pleasant things, if you can swallow the perverse idea of a consulting detective – one of the profession whose badge is the Holmes magnifying glass – being blind. Though equipped with a keen observer in the perfect manservant Parkinson, Carrados does not merely sit around deducing: he makes his own observations with ears, nose and fingertips.

*The Eyes of Max Carrados* opens with a somewhat defensive essay which chronicles astonishing feats of the blind. Most of the anecdotes come from an 1820 book of blind notables and some might have improved in the telling. Carrados himself outdoes them all and perhaps combines a few too many amazing abilities for real conviction. One memorable moment comes when he blindly con-

fronts the murderous spy whose gun is already out and who has already taken a pot-shot at Parkinson:

"Damn," came the low murmur to his ear. "Ein anderer!"

It was not the time to ask for explanations. [...] As [Carrados] once stopped to explain to Monsieur Dompierre, upon an occasion less hurried but quite as tense, he aimed by sound and practised round a watch. He fired now into the centre of the "Damn!"...

Exit one snarling Teutonic villain.

(There is a long-standing character in the superhero comics who is blind but nevertheless dons red tights to perform incredible feats of acrobatic derring-do as "Daredevil," steering his mighty leaps by aural radar. I've always wondered whether this chap's creator had been a Carrados fan.)

Such violent action is very unusual, though. Like Kai Lung, Carrados normally maintains an unbroken flow of smooth talk, especially when being menaced or kidnapped, and many of the little deductive treats he offers his acquaintances are plausibly implausible in the genuine Holmes manner: "The man who sat with me bit his finger-nails, smoked Algerian cigars and wore an elastic stocking."

This time, explanations are not given. Anyone can smell cigar smoke, and Carrados has no doubt written a monograph on it. Perhaps a trained ear might interpret the little muffled sounds of nail-biting. We're left to puzzle over whether, by walking a little way with an unsuspecting blackguard, Carrados could really make that last deduction from his tread. Thrusting one's hand up his trouser leg, however unobtrusively done... But there are some nice coups, as when that fine-tuned sense of touch detects the groove in a wooden ruler where the highly sinister and significant measurement of four and seven-eighths inches has been marked by a villainous finger-nail.

**I**t's fun to chart the progress of Carrados's reading ability. The key to this is of course the impression made by the type on the paper in those pre-photolitho days. Initially we find him reading newspaper headlines. By and by it emerges that he can finger-read the small print too, "though not with the same facility"; in subsequent stories he extends



his range to handwriting and the print on playing cards. Introducing *Best Max Carrados Detective Stories* (Dover, 1972), E.F. Bleiler not unjustly called him "a blind man who can see perfectly well."

In similar vein, our hero unsee-ingly penetrates disguises, detecting false moustaches at five yards' range by the pong of spirit gum; smells the anaesthetic from a drugged posy placed momentarily on the ground, out in the open, two weeks previously; and with sensitive fingers observes not merely that an "ancient" coin is forged but that the forgery carries the unmistakable stylistic marks of Pietro Stelli of Padua.

Genuine erudition creeps in whenever the story turns on numismatics: Carrados is a coin collector and his creator's major work of non-fiction was *A Guide to the Varieties and Rarity of English Copper Coins: Charles II-Victoria* (1929). Elsewhere, the inside knowledge tends to be bluff. Bramah sometimes affronted the purists by simply making up new instant anaesthetics, mushroom poisons, or explosives. (A "24lb. thorite shell" sounds nice and thunderous, but unfortunately thorite exists and is merely the inert silicate of thorium.)

Some of the charm of these stories lies in the less magical uses of Carrados's blindness. It's vaguely pleasing when, as so often happens, his skills lead to his being taken for a sighted man until the moment of revelation. It's a useful disability, too: a blind investigator has the perfect excuse for wandering "accidentally" into private gardens, blundering into darkrooms, and the like – and when the lights go out he has the upper hand at once. A typically neat point is simply that Carrados does not hold playing-cards up to "read" them, and thus defeats the piquet-playing automaton of an ingenious though ultimately pathetic con-man.

In the better tales, Bramah improves on fairly standard situations by doing a little more work than necessary and adding his own quirky, often humorous twist. The elaborate robbery of an impregnable safe-deposit ends in sheer farce with a Wodehouse-like reform of the burglar, thanks to the uplifting ministry of the Salvation Army. The benevolent kidnapping in the famous "Disappearance of Marie Severe" rebounds as a deplorable

but luscious attack on the dottier excesses of early Christian Science. On a darker note, "The Tragedy of Brookbend Cottage" has Carrados penetrating and foiling a clever electrical murder-plan...but, with a touch of human insight rare in crime fiction of that era, even his success destroys the intended victim.

On rare occasions, and to the annoyance of later crime-fiction purists, the solution might be supernatural: Carrados is involved in one peculiar case where sinister emanations from a plague pit travel along the power-lines to emerge from a wall socket, and another where a good-luck charm that actually seems to work is identified by him as a nail from the True Cross. Bramah wasn't afraid to think big; another audacious and much more successful narrative deals with a scheme to steal Shakespeare's bones and ship them to America.

Lastly, one of the espionage plots anticipates a great deal that was to follow in fiction several decades later, with its political cover-up (for the sake of entente) of the awkward fact that the "enemy" spy is in fact from our ostensible ally France. Carrados himself offers the mature suggestion that it's only sensible for allies to keep track of each other's defence plans, although in this case the unearthed English secret documents might not be very worthwhile:

Mr Carrados looked extremely mysterious and half-reluctant for a moment. Then he spoke: "Do you know, Louis, of any great secret military camp where a surprise fleet of dirigibles and flying machines of a new and terrible kind is being formed by a far-seeing Government as a reserve against the day of Armageddon?"

"No," admitted Mr Carlyle...  
"Nor do I."

**I**s Ernest Bramah's writing now sliding into complete oblivion? All his actual novels are already forgotten, including two not yet mentioned. *The Mirror of Kong Ho* (1905) looks suspiciously like an attempt to make something more commercial of his favourite style by transplanting it, via a wordy Chinese visitor, to London: the good passages are separated by too many long and euphemistic descriptions of Western doings unsuited to the idiom, while Kong Ho with his endless comic naivety may get the best

of most situations but is nevertheless treated rather too patronizingly.

The SF *What Might Have Been* alias *The Secret of the League* (1907) features individual mechanical wings for all – "Hastings permitted mixed flying. It was a question that had embittered many a town council" – and a very Edwardian-Tory vision of the middle classes boldly going on strike against the loathed workers.

It's an unfortunate paradox that Bramah's finest and most original works, the three major Kai Lung collections (assembled as *The Kai Lung Omnibus* in 1936 and excerpted as *The Celestial Omnibus* in 1963), don't fit all that well into modern publishing categories. Two volumes were released as genre fantasy in the 1970s, but on the whole it seems that the fantasy market prefers big questing blockbusters and distrusts irony. (The same American series, Lin Carter's "Ballantine Adult Fantasy," included several of James Branch Cabell's almost equally ornate, ironic and distrusted works.) The *Wallet* was paperbacked as a "twentieth century classic" in the 1980s, and duly remaindered under the same label. A better category might be "humour," but elaborate prose which requires attention and never breaks into overt belly-laughs does not sit well on the humour shelves between such sophisticated modern mirth-makers as Wicked Willie and *101 Uses For a Dead Yuppie*.

Three boos, by the way, to Frank Muir for failing to include even a snippet from these stories in his otherwise dreadfully exhaustive *The Oxford Book of Humorous Prose*.

Conversely, we can surely expect some further interest in the more obviously dated but easily categorized detective stories. Max Carrados would seem ideal for one of those lush period TV series with a plethora of shiny old cars: his blindness could readily become a trademark as notable as Poirot's moustaches or the monocle of Lord Peter Wimsey – another quoter of Kai Lung, incidentally.

Next year might see a small revival. I remember the early-80s lull in G.K. Chesterton reissues, before the free-for-all when copyright on his works expired in 1986. If my dates are correct, Kai Lung and Max Carrados enter the public domain in 1992. Are any publishers listening?



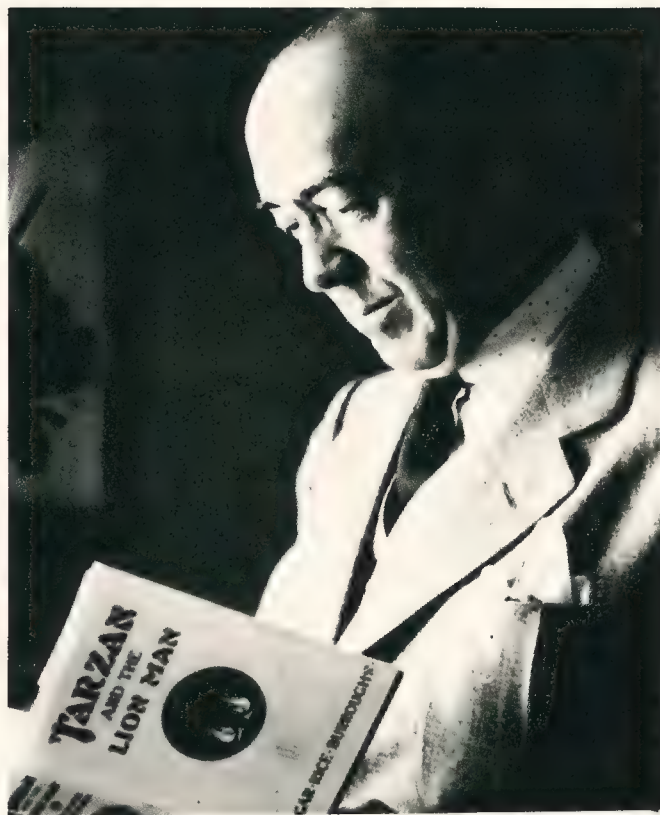
# Yesterday's Bestsellers, 5: Edgar Rice Burroughs and *Tarzan of the Apes*

by Brian Stableford

**I**n chapter fourteen of *Tarzan of the Apes* by Edgar Rice Burroughs the English nobleman William Cecil Clayton, who has gone astray in "the twilight depths of the African jungle," finds himself face to face with a hungry lion. His end seems nigh, but hurtling to his rescue comes the most remarkable person he has ever seen: a man who is "the embodiment of physical perfection and giant strength." The stranger, armed only with a knife, wrestles and kills the lion, then stands erect over its carcass and lets loose a bloodcurdling cry of feral triumph.

This extraordinary event is even more melodramatic than the bare facts indicate. William Clayton does not know, and does not find out in the course of the novel – although the reader has known all along – that this magnificent creature is in fact his cousin, and the rightful heir to the title which he believes to be his own! Thanks to a miraculously fortunate admixture of genetic and environmental influences *Tarzan of the Apes* is, in a perfectly literal sense, the epitome of the Noble Savage.

**T***arzan of the Apes* was first published in the October 1912 issue of *The All-Story Magazine*, and was an instant hit. By the time it appeared in book form its author had already produced a sequel, *The Return of Tarzan*, and he went on to answer popular demand by issuing more than twenty more. Burroughs was ultimately to found his own publishing company to



Edgar Rice Burroughs

***Tarzan is the one figure of mythical dimension in the Burroughs canon, and the mystery which must be unravelled if Burroughs' success is to be understood***

package his own works, and he registered the name "Tarzan" as a trademark. By such means he became the first man ever to make a million dollars writing popular fiction. Burroughs wrote other popular series of novels, including one set on Mars and another on the inner surface of the supposedly-hollow earth, but the foundation-stone of his success was the character of Tarzan, who became one of that select handful of fictional individuals – the others include Scrooge, Sherlock Holmes and

Dracula – whose names are universally familiar to everyone, even to people who have never read any of the books in which they appear.

Tarzan's career long ago overflowed the print medium, extending into a long series of films (after several silents, the first talkie was released in 1932) and a plethora of comic strips. This extension is a remarkable feat, because – unlike Sherlock Holmes, who could be confronted with an infinite supply of unique puzzles to unravel – Tarzan is a character of rather limited scope. His original creator soon began to find it difficult to think of new things for him to do; there were plenty more lions to vanquish, but killing them quickly became a perfunctory ritual, and it is unsurprising that having run the customary gamut of damsels in distress, sneering villains, cannibal tribesmen and lost cities, Burroughs' plotting strategies became increasingly desperate. He dabbled in the bizarre in such novels as *Tarzan and the Ant Men* (1924) and *Tarzan at*

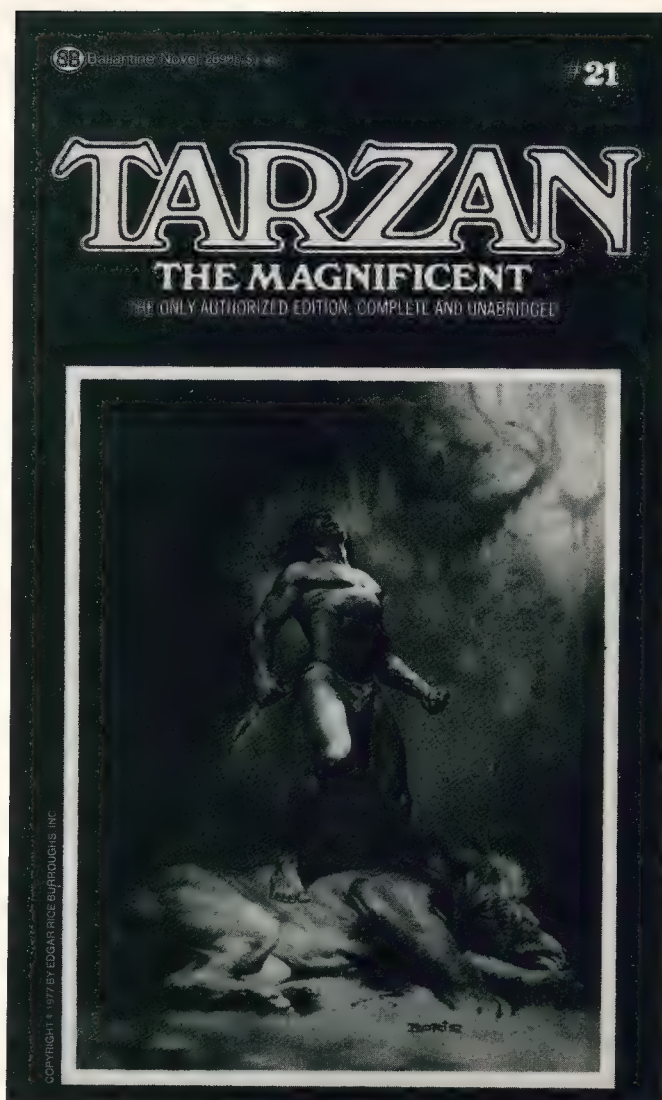


the *Earth's Core* (1930), and he resorted to satire in *Tarzan and the Lion Man* (1934) – in which he derided the film Tarzan, whom he considered to be an insulting travesty of the character he created – but in the end he simply gave up, and the series decayed into enfeebled exercises in self-plagiarism. (One of the later novels, *Tarzan and the Forbidden City* [1938], was obviously ghost-written, by someone who seems not to have bothered to study the originals he was meant to be imitating.) Despite such difficulties, though, Tarzan's career continued long after Burroughs' death, and would have proliferated even more promiscuously had the Burroughs estate not been so conscientious in taking legal action against pirates.

Attempts by other writers to imitate the Tarzan novels are numerous, and there has grown up a whole sub-genre of adventure stories about feral children raised to near-superhumanity by tigers, leopards, bears and (most recently, in Nicholas Luard's 1990 novel *Kala*) hyenas. Burroughs' other books have been even more widely imitated, especially the series of interplanetary adventures which he initiated with his first novel, *A Princess of Mars* (1912 as "Under the Moons of Mars"; in book form 1917), but this is largely because these other novels have offered more imaginative scope to imitators – the exotic settings allow the introduction of an infinite variety of grotesquely monstrous enemies to be overcome by the athletic heroes. It is certainly arguable that Burroughs' most interesting works are his more imaginatively daring forays into science fiction – especially the two trilogies collected as *The Land That Time Forgot* (1918; in book form 1924) and *The Moon Maid* (1923-25; in book form 1926) – and it is not surprising that these works still have a cult following. However, it is Tarzan who is the one figure of mythical dimension in the Burroughs canon, and the mystery which must be unravelled if Burroughs' success is to be understood.

In *Tarzan of the Apes*, John Clayton, heir apparent to the title of Lord Greystoke, is cast away with his new bride on the coast of equatorial West Africa, following a mutiny aboard their yacht. They are presumed dead, and eventually do die, but their baby son is adopted by Kala, a female of an imaginary protohuman species of ape, whose own infant has been killed by the "king" of her "tribe." In order to survive in this harsh milieu John Clayton jr. must cultivate greater bodily strength and fighting skill than his adoptive kindred, and he eventually develops such supremacy that he is able to kill the king and take his place. His superior intelligence allows him to learn the use of weapons without instruction or example, and also to learn to read and write (but not to speak) English from the books left behind in his parents' ramshackle hut.

Tarzan's adoptive tribe has human neighbours, but are not on good terms with them, and the difference in his skin colour prevents him identifying with them; it is not until he is twenty years old that Tarzan encounters other white men, who are marooned exactly as he was. This party consists of an American antiquarian, Archimedes Q. Porter, his daughter Jane and her maid, his assistant, and William Clayton. These newcomers fail dismally – and rather farcically – to cope with the wilderness, and Tarzan becomes their secret benefactor, watching over them and saving their lives whenever necessary. He falls in love with Jane after rescuing her from one of



his adoptive cousins, who attempts to rape her, but understandable difficulties in communication prevent him from finding out that his feelings are reciprocated, and he wrongly concludes that she is in love with Clayton.

Eventually, the new castaways are rescued by French soldiers, who are forced to abandon their commander, Paul D'Arnot, when he is carried off by cannibals. Tarzan rescues D'Arnot, and learns a great deal from him – including the French language – while nursing him back to health. D'Arnot, meanwhile, deduces Tarzan's true identity from the contents of the hut. D'Arnot escorts Tarzan to the civilized world, and while the Frenchman sets out to prove that he is the true Lord Greystoke, Tarzan goes to America in search of Jane.

Tarzan finds Jane in dire straits, about to be reluctantly married off to a wicked financier to whom her father owes money, but he contrives to save her from this sad fate (and from a forest fire). He is, however, still labouring under the delusion that Jane loves William Clayton, and when he receives a telegram confirming that he is the true heir to the Greystoke title he decides that honour compels him discreetly to disappear, leaving both the title and the girl to his cousin.

*The Return of Tarzan* follows the consequences of this unparalleled *beau geste*. Tarzan lives for a while in Paris, but he discovers that civilization is too insipid and hypocritical for his unrefined tastes, and is glad to embark upon a career as a secret agent. While he is *en route* for



# TARZAN

AND THE ANT MEN

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South Africa, a chance meeting with Jane's best friend allows him to discover his mistake in thinking that Jane loved his cousin, but he is thrown overboard by his enemies before being able to do anything about it. Not until he has completed a further series of jungle adventures – in the course of which he becomes the chief of the Waziri tribe and discovers the lost city of Opar – can he locate Jane again; even then he must take care of his civilized enemies, and overcome further difficulties and misunderstandings before finally marrying her.

Only one other book in the series, *The Son of Tarzan* (1917), really carries Tarzan's life story forward to any significant degree. *Jungle Tales of Tarzan* (1919) fills in details of his early life omitted from *Tarzan of the Apes*, but the remainder are repetitive accounts of formulaic adventures which simply constitute a series of footnotes to the story told in the first two volumes. The core of the true Tarzan myth ("true" in the sense that the grunting, liana-swinging, crocodile-wrestling paragon of inarticulacy portrayed in the early films is, as Burroughs thought, a mere travesty) is to be found entire in the first two books – and there is a case to be made that it really resides in the first alone.

**T**arzan is, essentially, a creature of two worlds. He is a jungle predator who stalks his prey, kills it – with his bare hands if necessary – and eats it raw. Other animal predators are his respected rivals, and

despite his awesome physique it is his intelligence which gives him the edge over them. His ability to reason is superior to their inborn instincts, and his own instincts are those of an idealized English nobleman: he is by nature gallant, chivalrous and dutiful. It is, however, precisely these noble instincts which lead him to despise the world of civilized men; however paradoxical it may seem, it is his harsh upbringing in a world of nature red in tooth and claw which has allowed his instinctive nobility to flourish. Human "predators" he despises, because their motives for killing seem to him dishonest and perverted. Like William Clayton, but in most cases infinitely more so, the vast majority of men are unentitled to their inheritance; they have, ironically, been *brutalized* by their insulation from the law of the jungle.

## Perhaps Tarzan's jungle is a perverse Utopia, but it is a Utopia nevertheless

In Tarzan's world-view, the violence of the jungle is entirely legitimate; in the jungle one has to kill to eat, and one must fight other predators for the privilege, and that is what one does. The violence of civilized men, by contrast, is a kind of sickness, based in oppression, deceit and naked sadism. Tarzan can find no authentic morality in the world of civilized men, where competition in the interests of survival has been overtaken by competition for money, whose principal use is "to purchase the effeminate pleasures of weaklings." He can see little moral difference between the great majority of black men (superstitious cannibals) and the great majority of white men (greedy hypocrites), and even that minority of men – black or white – which stands above the general run of their kind has its superior counterpart in the animal world, in species like the elephant and certain rare individuals like Jad-bal-ja the Golden Lion.

It scarcely needs to be emphasized that Tarzan's jungle bears very little resemblance to the actual African rain forest, ecologically speaking. Many of the animals featured in *Tarzan of the Apes* (including lions) are not forest-dwellers, and the apes which play such a vital role are entirely imaginary. The author's first version of the novel also featured tigers, though this proved a little too much for the copy-editor, who removed them. Tarzan's jungle is a purely hypothetical construct: a primeval state of nature inhabited by archetypal symbols (thus, each species has its identifying name: Numa the Lion, Tantor the Elephant, etc.) If we are to make sense of this we can only do so in psychological terms; matters of narrative realism do not really enter into it.

*Tarzan of the Apes* is a curious celebration of Rousseau's ideas about the nobility of savagery and the idea that a fundamentally virtuous human nature is routinely spoiled and perverted by cultural artifice. As a parable of the power of innocence, it has a considerable appeal to those individuals who feel most acutely the manifold constraints and petty injustices of life in civilized society. Many of those most afflicted by such stress are children, but anyone can identify with Tarzan who has felt the weariness of conformity with social norms and the frustrations of confrontation with cultural complexity. Tarzan is, however, more than just a mighty

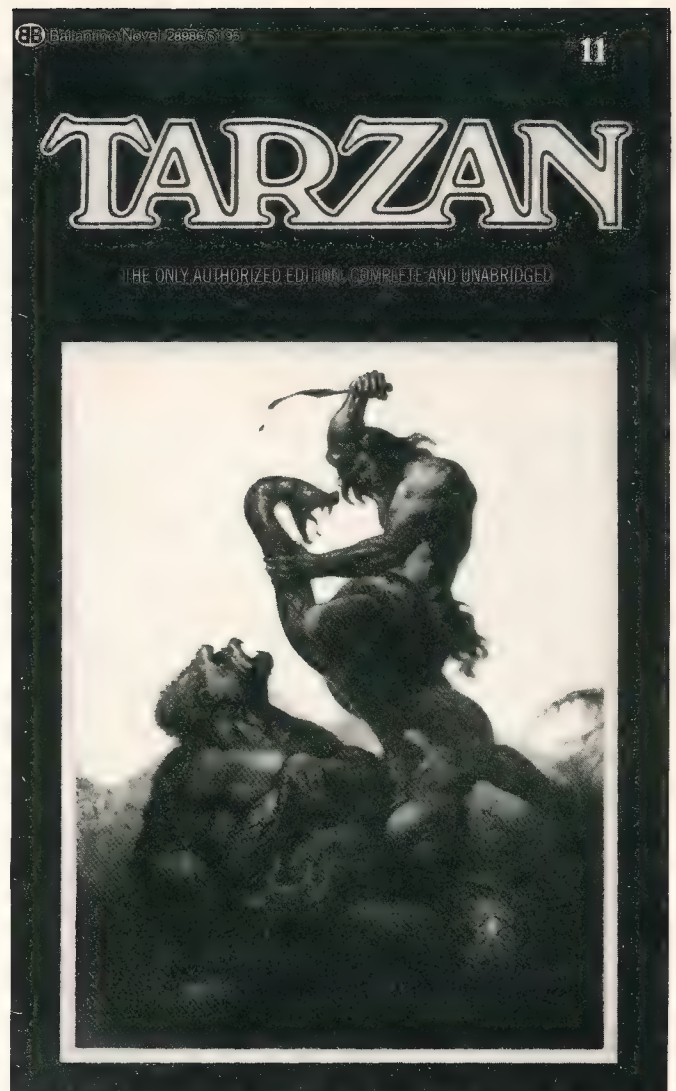


barbarian licensed by circumstance to do all the things we are physically and circumstantially prevented from doing; he has a *wholeness* which we have not. He has heart of a lion and the mind of an aristocrat, *and the two are not in conflict*. In him, emotion and intellect, appetite and self-control, *id* and *superego*, are in perfect harmony. If he is out of place in high society, that is only because high society is not worthy of him; he is at home in the jungle not because he is bestial but because he is strong enough to subject the jungle to his ennobling influence, in becoming its rightful and acknowledged king.

**T**he most lyrical passages in the Tarzan books describe the moments when Tarzan comes home to the jungle after a time in the civilized world, and celebrates his release. There is a similar critical moment in *The Son of Tarzan*, when Tarzan's son – who has been brought up to be properly civilized – is forced by circumstance to discover his true self in that same jungle. This is the ultimate liberation which the Tarzan books offer their readers: not simply the joy of casting off all the shackles of civilization, but the promise that when that is done, *you will find yourself at home*. Perhaps Tarzan's jungle is a perverse Utopia, but it is a Utopia nevertheless. It is an unpeaceful Garden of Eden where the lion will never lie down with the lamb, nor can he ever be expected to. It is a paradise for the adventurous, who would be bored to tears in Heaven. Many adults deem this a childish idea, and it is perfectly understandable that no one but a child is likely to be sufficiently unselfconscious to confess that his idea of the good life involves the freedom to slaughter human and animal villains on a massive scale; but if we were honest, there would probably be few among us who could claim to be entirely unaffected by fantasies of doing violence – often extreme and ingenious violence – to those who annoy and frustrate us in the thousand trivial ways which everyday life permits and necessitates.

It is partly because *Tarzan of the Apes* offers us this kind of gratification in a particularly straightforward fashion that Tarzan has won his privileged place among modern hero-myths. But our recognition of the Tarzanic dreams which lurk within us is not without irony, as we know very well when we choose to find the name suitable as a mocking nickname for a certain politician – whose entitlement to it may, in the end, have been what dissuaded his fellow MPs from electing him their leader. Nor is this irony absent from the books, which recognize and try to deal with it. This ironic dimension shows up most clearly in Tarzan's problematic relationship with Jane.

Jane, as befits a modest heroine cooked up according to the standard melodramatic recipe of her day, is a civilizing influence on her husband. She threatens to enmesh him in a net of domesticity and tame him. In most melodramas, this is seen as a suitable fate for a hero, or at least a suitable end for a book, but it is clearly not right for Tarzan, nor for a series of more than twenty books. After their marriage Tarzan does his best to live with Jane in London, making relatively infrequent returns to his true home, but the conflict of interest between them quickly becomes exposed when their son Jack begins to show signs that he is a chip off the old block. Jane tries to stamp out these atavistic tendencies, but is thwarted – Jack's eventual escape from his false home to his true one is a triumph, and amply demonstrates



to Tarzan the folly of allowing himself to be tamed. The family moves to Africa, but this is only a partial solution to the problem.

In *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar* (1918) Burroughs afflicts Tarzan with amnesia so that he can revert fully to type, but this was not a solution which could be extended indefinitely. Burroughs must have realized by then what the pressure of melodramatic convention had presumably prevented him from realizing before – that the end of *Tarzan of the Apes*, far from being a natural lead-in to a sequel, was in fact a perfect conclusion: Jane should indeed have been left to the weak-kneed cousin, while the true hero remained married to his jungle.

In order to solve this problem Burroughs initially took the courageous course; in the magazine serial which became the first half of *Tarzan the Untamed* (1920) he simply killed Jane off. He relented of this harsh decision, however, and brought her back to life in the book version; it is not entirely clear whether this was because his courage failed him in the face of the awesome might of literary convention or because he realized that a Jane who had been carried off, but not killed, could have an entire novel (*Tarzan the Terrible*, 1921) devoted to her recovery. After *Tarzan the Terrible*, however, Burroughs found an alternative solution to the threat which Jane posed to his otherwise invincible hero: he ignored her completely. (Apart from in one novel, *Tarzan's Quest*, 1936.)



This was, arguably, a better solution. Jane's death might have allowed Tarzan to be tempted again, but while she was permanently present – but conveniently offstage – the question of Tarzan being ensnared by sexual attraction simply could not arise. This was doubly convenient. The kind of hero which Tarzan is must, indeed, remain “untamed” and “terrible,” and in a different era he might – like modern hunters of urban wildernesses who are “licensed to kill” – have been prodigiously promiscuous, but given the attitude of his time he was far better off being safely married to an absentee wife, honour-bound to be utterly chaste.

**P**hilip José Farmer, whose *Tarzan Alive* (1972) offers a “corrected” biography of a person whose career was allegedly misreported by Burroughs, tried to adapt his character to the modern formula, but it is by no means clear that such a move was necessary or desirable; a plethora of loveless sex is not particularly attractive, and as a narrative device it quickly becomes as boringly ritualistic as slaughtering lions. It is not surprising that Farmer's own Tarzan pastiches were initially produced as exercises in pornography (although one of them, *Lord of the Trees*, was eventually published – in a rather slim edition – in a version from which all the sex scenes had been carefully excised).

It is not simply the fact that Tarzan was the product of a sexually-inhibited era that makes his innocence appropriate. One can readily see, in retrospect, that he never should have tried to “grow up” at all; his closest literary relative is not Kipling's Mowgli, whose task is to be educated in spite of his peculiar circumstances, but J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan. It was a mistake for Tarzan to take Jane back from his effete cousin, but it was also a mistake for him to try to set up home in Paris and become a secret agent. His one and only true home was his jungle Never Land, and – as Peter Pan found out at the end of the novel version of his career, *Peter and Wendy* (1911) – there was nothing for one such as he within the borders of the real world but tragic disillusionment. Even the most determined popular fiction always has to recognize, in the end, that in the real world, uncompromised nobility doesn't work, and hypocrisy does.

At one point in *The Return of Tarzan* Burroughs states explicitly that to be a child or a primeval man is “the same thing in a way,” and that Tarzan is both. This opinion, outdated now, is consonant with the thinking of many early anthropologists, who tried to account for the “primitiveness” of alien cultures by likening their ways of thought to those of children – a view wholeheartedly endorsed by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1913). But Burroughs differs from all these contemporaries – even, and especially, from Barrie – in seeing nothing *incomplete* in Tarzan's situation. Tarzan is not a case of arrested development: he is the authentic, whole man; it is those who have gone on to maturity who have become fragmented, as he nearly does himself.

This image of the ideal man recurs in other Burroughs novels, ranging from the offbeat romance of *The Eternal Lover* (1914/15; in book form 1925) to the playful comedy of *The Cave Girl* (1913/17; in book form 1925); it is the condition to which all his heroes tacitly aspire, even though they may not be aware of it themselves. Nor is this an implicitly masculine ideal, despite the implication of such exercises in role-reversal as H.M.E. Clamp's *Wild Cat* (1935), in which the feral woman is condemned

by an unthinking author to that hideous fate-worse-than-death which is reserved for the heroines of popular romantic fiction; true female Tarzans can be found in Burroughs' *The Cave Girl* and in S. Fowler Wright's *The Island of Captain Sparrow* (1928) and *Dream; or, The Simian Maid* (1931).

This image of innocent wholeness is, of course, quite false. *Tarzan of the Apes* is a bare-faced lie, from beginning to end, but Burroughs' genius as a writer of popular fiction lay in the realization that it is not necessary for a writer to pretend too much, and that readers are capable of being grateful for the kind of sincerity which goes straight to the heart of their nostalgic daydreams. We are all condemned to live in a world whose moral and material imperfections are manifest, and where honesty is – let's face it – the second best policy. Why should we be ashamed to deal with bold and naked lies, if they offer us a vision of a way of being which not only licenses all the impulses which civilized society (necessarily and rightly) demands that we should suppress, but insists that we would be better and happier people were we fortunate enough to enjoy that way of being?

## ***Tarzan's closest literary relative is not Kipling's Mowgli, but J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan***

*Tarzan of the Apes* is the purest kind of romance there is, because it is one of the few novels which does not pretend that romance must, in the end, be accommodated to social institutions. Its big lie leads us not to the counterfeit ecstasy of wealth and marriage, but to the true ecstasy of being the rightful king of the jungle. It leads us, admittedly, nowhere – “nowhere” is, after all, what Utopia means – but if the tide of literary fashion has now brought us back to an era when you can't get to nowhere from here and now, perhaps that is a state of affairs which is not entirely to be welcomed.

Earlier subjects in Brian Stableford's series of essays on “Yesterday's Bestsellers” have included:

1. Marie Corelli
2. P.C. Wren
3. Rider Haggard
4. James Hadley Chase

See page 20 for details of how to order back issues.

Coming in the next issue of **MILLION**: Robinson Crusoe's Descendants.



# From Serfs to Supergirls

Historical and romantic fiction reviewed

by **Mary Cadogan**

**V**alerie Anand's *The Proud Villeins* (Headline, £4.99) is high romance of the historical rather than the sexual variety. This rough-edged saga of man's exploitation of man – and woman – in the eleventh and twelfth centuries is daunting but not, overall, depressing because resilience, and determination to achieve eventual freedom, are its keynotes.

The story encompasses several generations. Ivon de Clairpont, a Norman knight in service in England at the Abbey of St Simeon is betrayed, captured and sold into thralldom in what he sees as the God-forsaken reaches of Northumbria. His several efforts to escape prove abortive, and his fate is made tolerable only by the love of Gunnor, a Saxon woman who nurses him through severe injuries and lifts him out of despair. Their children and grandchildren are, sometimes rather tenuously, sustained by Ivon's legacy of his dream of freedom. Female characters often emerge with surprising strength, and the author vividly recreates what appears to be the authentic atmosphere of the primitive and challenging society which grew from the uneasy amalgam of Saxon, Viking and Norman cultures.

In *The Sword and the Flame* by Pamela Hill (Hale, £14.95) conflict and power struggles unfold in the settings of the Royal Courts of Scotland, France and England in the sixteenth century. The leading character is Marie (Mary) of Lorraine who, widowed after her marriage to Louis Duc de Longueville, became the wife of King James V of Scotland. She had two sons by Longueville and both died young: similarly the two boy children of her marriage to James died in infancy. Only their daughter Mary – who was to become the legendary but ill-fated Queen first of France and then of Scotland – survived into full maturity.

Mary Stuart's presence in any story ensures colour and charisma, even though for most of the action of *The Sword and the Flame* she is not much more than a pretty but shadowy child. The spotlight remains on her mother, Mary of Lorraine, who after the death of King James has the unenviable tasks of acting as Scottish regent for her daughter, and constantly juggling for the child's benefit with royal, political and religious pressures from the three countries. She manages for many years to keep some

sort of balance, although the air around her seems fetid with intrigue and passion. This robustly told and breath-catching tale ends at the beginning of Mary Stuart's British story when, as the very young Dowager Queen of France, she returns to Scotland.

**C**onflict between Stuarts and Tudors is one of the motifs of *England's Mistress* by Maureen Peters (Hale, £12.95). It is concerned with Elizabeth the First's wily manoeuvring to resist the bonds of matrimony, while – strictly in the interests of England – appearing to encourage the successive advances of her various princely foreign suitors. Even though readers will be well aware of the outcome of the plots and stratagems which Maureen Peters chronicles, suspense is sometimes so skilfully built up and sustained that there are moments when one really does begin to wonder whether the calculating Elizabeth has been caught sufficiently off guard by one or another suitor to make a match of it, and whether the shrewd and far-seeing "Gloriana" will somehow manage to resist the rumours, connivance and genuine sense of menace that eventually lead her to sign the death-warrant of her Scottish cousin.

The survivor of an uncertain childhood and a turbulent adolescence, Elizabeth is shown as well equipped to deal with psychological duels and bitter dissensions: "...savage and primitive... beneath the silks and satins of courtly etiquette," she takes satisfaction from hunting, bear- and bull-baiting, or watching her knights in violent jousts. It must be difficult for any author to breathe fresh insights into this avidly charted Tudor life and reign, but Maureen Peters manages to present her fiction and findings with a sense of freshness.

Historical fact also triggers events and relationships in Margaret Evans's *A Place of Eagles* (Hale, £13.95). When the fortunes of war do not favour him in England, King Charles the First looks to Wales for loyalty and succour. From "humble hillmen" to "governors of mighty Conwy and Harlech Castles," thousands rally to the Royalist cause, although in the end these trusty die-hards fail to stave off the Cromwellian victory. Their lives and loves are conveyed convincingly – if sometimes simplistically –

against the clanging and clattering and gore and anguish of siege and battle. The longest and strongest thread of this tempestuous tale is the illicit romance between Jane of Maesyneuadd and William Owen. *A Place of Eagles* is a celebration of the real-life manor house of Maesyneuadd as well as of an enduring passion.

**W**e come forward in time to the 1980s with *The Lady in Waiting* by Deborah Fowler (Century, £13.99). This is not, as its title might suggest, a courtly drama; the Lady in Waiting is the name of an eighteenth-century Suffolk coaching inn, which becomes the property of Prue Marshall, the book's twentieth-century heroine. Eventually she too has to become a lady in waiting – and the birth of her son brings not only the expected natural joy but the laying of a ghostly mystery.

Almost as soon as Prue moves into the inn she is aware of a presence which is familiar yet deeply disturbing. She is caught in "terrible waves of fear and despair" as suspense mounts, and its dissolution is slow, complicated and atmospheric.

Prue realizes that she has strong links with Elizabeth, the long ago mistress of Thomas, the Earl of Clare. (Their romance has given the inn its name because Elizabeth seemed always to be waiting there for Thomas's visits.) In uncovering the events of Elizabeth's and Thomas's lives, and those of their love-child, Guy, Prue becomes involved with Charles, the current Earl of Clare. Their relationship begins to mirror the eighteenth-century romance which so intrigues them both. Time switches are so cleverly manipulated that the reader has to do a lot of guessing before the double-levelled story reaches its climax, and questions about ghosts and/or the possibilities of reincarnation are answered.

**Fast Friends** (Bantam, £3.99) by Jill Mansell has a present-day setting. Three boarding-school chums meet up again later in life when, despite strong differences in personalities and aspirations, they show a great deal of solidarity and forge a really lasting friendship. Roz Valdener and Loulou Marks live in glitzy worlds: Roz is a TV programme presenter while Loulou owns "the trendiest wine bar in town." Both are stunning



and, not unnaturally, self-assured. Camilla Stewart, in contrast, is a bored and unappreciated housewife and mum. Worse still, it turns out (when she first meets Roz again after separation since their school-days) that her unsatisfactory spouse is having an affair with the glamorous TV presenter! Nevertheless the friendship of the three girls, re-forged, becomes extremely important to them all. Aided by her glamorous chums, Camilla divorces her husband, shedding not only him but domestic dreariness and many pounds of excess weight. With a new designer wardrobe her post-divorce rehabilitation goes from strength to strength, and it is she who eventually claims and keeps the romantic affections of Nico, the rock-star whose fascinations work at various times on each of the three friends.

Although Camilla seems set to emulate the "a thrill a minute lifestyle" enjoyed by Roz and Loulou, she remains engagingly unpretentious, kindly and understanding, and, with all this going for her, not only achieves romantic fulfilment but becomes the anchor-woman of the ex-schoolgirl trio.

**I**n *Conquest* (Headline, £4.99) Elizabeth Walker transports us with Flora, her heroine, to Kathmandu. The daughter of a well-off family, Flora is a charity worker, with rather more enthusiasm than experience. She meets "big, confident and devastatingly attractive" Don Harrington who has come to Nepal to conquer Everest. *Conquest* seems to be part of his nature, and of course Flora soon becomes one of his targets. Their relationship starts on a passionate "high" which is unsustainable; the action moves from Nepal to Europe and back as Elizabeth and Don, in trying to fulfil their individual aspirations, appear to drift further and further apart. In the end the magic of the magnificent country around them, and the resilience of their mutual attraction, bring them firmly together as true partners and equals: "They were like boxers who had finally, after many bloody bouts, come to respect each other. The contest was over and no one had won and no one had lost." Not perhaps the most romantic of analogies, but a fitting one for their turbulent relationship.

Family ties are strong in *Lives of Value* (Headline, £14.95) by Sharleen Cooper Cohen. Suzanne and Steffi are sisters who share a great deal, but whose lives have very different flavours. Suzanne, the more conformist, achieves success as a writer but things turn sour when an anonymous smear campaign against her artistic integrity begins. Steffi who has always been the rebel of the family remains to the end an experimenter and a challenger of convention, despite the increasing disability and pain which an incurable illness inflicts upon her. The sisters' lives and loves frequently touch and become enmeshed; there are times when it seems to Suzanne that it is Steffi

who is her unknown enemy. How the identity of her enemy is eventually revealed makes exciting reading, and the interweaving of this mystery element with the fulfilments and frustrations of family and romantic bonds results in an addictive story. As in so many other contemporary love-stories, friendships between women make a strong and sharp background for the development of characterizations and events.

With Joanna Kingsley's *Treasures* (Bantam, £4.99) we are once again in "the fast lane" of the world of glamorous achievement. Young and beautiful Pietra D'Angeli from New York and the

voluptuous Andrea Sacco from Europe become rivals for power in the jewellery design business. Despite their enmity it transpires that "these two irresistible and ambitious women" are bound by dramatic and tragic happenings which took place before they were born. Mysteries to be unravelled yet again – and, again, a book which provides a potent combination of suspense, romance and ambition as they affect the lives of two contemporary super-girls. There is nothing bland or low-key about *Treasures*; it is the perfect escapist-but-touched-with-reality story which could brighten a dull day.

(Mary Cadogan)

## Not So Cosy

Crime fiction reviewed by **Mat Coward**

**R**idley Pearson, an American crime writer in his late thirties, is the first recipient of the Fulbright/Raymond Chandler Fellowship at Oxford University. This award, made by Wadham College and Chandler's estate, is for a writer "who has published several significant works but has not yet gained a major national or international reputation." Intended for writers in Chandler's genre (a vague definition, judging by this winner), it includes a residency in Britain, seminars and workshops with UK writers, and an opportunity to research police procedure at New Scotland Yard. Sounds a bit like one of those theme weekends they advertise in the colour supplements.

James Dewitt, the hero of Pearson's *Probable Cause* (Macdonald, £13.95), starts out as a forensic criminologist. By the eighth page, however, he has become a detective sergeant, following the murder of his wife by a madman (who also puts one of his daughters into a permanent coma).

Dewitt's post of detective sergeant has been specially created for him; they've never before felt the need for such an officer in Carmel, California, the tourist town which once elected Clint Eastwood mayor. It's just as well they've got him now, mind – now that a series of supposed suicides-in-cars seem to be, instead, the work of a crazy serial killer, of the sub-species "Trapper."

Anyone writing psycho thrillers today has two main problems. The first is that if you've read one, you've read the basic plot of them all – a cop trying to come to terms with a personal tragedy goes after a mad but brilliant murderer, who at some stage threatens a relative or lover of the detective. Three-quarters of the way through the novel (or TVM) the hero seems to have won, the illusion of peace being broken when psycho returns from the grave, (or jail, or padded cell), and the two men must meet for the final

shoot-out. This takes place in an interesting location, of which we have previously been given a guided tour.

Pearson gets round this trap by being both imaginative and restrained. He accepts that to do the job properly he must follow the rules – but at the same time he puts in just enough slight twists and minor surprises to bring a moderate blush to the know-it-all reader's face.

The second difficulty is impossible to get round: post-Thomas Harris, every serial slayer story will be compared unfavourably to *Red Dragon* and *Silence of the Lambs* – particularly if, as in this case, it involves the policeman trying to establish a relationship with an already incarcerated killer, who might be able to identify the one on the loose. If you can't write that particular scene better than Harris – and it'll be a while before anybody does – then maybe you should leave it alone.

*Probable Cause* is a bit messy; it should have been streamlined or shortened. It can't quite decide whether to be a psycho chiller, a forensic whodunnit, or a psychological thriller. Even so, I enjoyed it. Pearson, and his character, Dewitt, both have a way with them, and I think the Fulbright judges have made a shrewd choice.

**J**an Roberts's first novel, *A Blood Affair* (Collins, £14.99), struck me as not only bad, but bizarre. It's a sort of Mafia gothic, which begins when India Grey (a heroine, not a tea-bag), is raped in a Georgetown, Washington hairdressing salon. The rapist is killed in the act, by a balaclava'd mystery man. As a direct result of this awful experience, Teabag (I mean, India) marries a Mafia heir, without knowing what he does for a living, and falls in love with a Catholic priest. Drug-dealers, DC society, and the IRA are all there as well, along with gurt big dollops of sexy violence, and violent sex.



There are some passages of staggeringly inept writing: "Oh yes. She had left. She had left her father weeping in his room. It was him she had run to in the middle of some terrifying night when she was small. He who had given her the sanctuary of his arms and dandled her on his knee and made soothing sounds with his vinegary breath."

Some of the writing is okay, and Roberts certainly has a background that should help her produce decent thrillers – born in New Zealand, she studied law, and has worked as a theatre nurse in Washington, Hong Kong and London. Her career has been done a disservice, however, by the agents and publishers who allowed this unready draft into print, and thus gave cruel reviewers an opportunity to ridicule sentences like the one that opens chapter eight: "Salvatore Coltelli sucked the flesh from the head of a boiled pigeon and reflected upon the raid on Freddy's."

I don't know if it's just me, but I am coming to dread first meetings with Detective Chief Inspectors created by women from middle-England. There seems to be a regrettable tendency amongst female crime writers towards rather dull, worthy DCIs, all of whom are sensitive, ruminative, and fond of poetry. Ruth Rendell's Wexford is an example; until I saw George Baker play him on the telly, I had no picture of him at all.

These ideal fantasy coppers, with their philistine sergeants for contrast, invariably have soap-opera problems at home (usually involving teenage children), and the villains and civilians they encounter use colloquialisms as if they'd learned them from Linguaphone. This is June Thomson territory, where whodunnits roll off an assembly line, perfectly adequate, but rather uninspiring. Clare Curzon's *Cat's Cradle* (Collins, £12.99) is a bit like that, but saved, in my view, by having an unusually interesting victim, and displaying a convincing knowledge of forensic procedure and ballistics.

In the straightforward modern village murder, which this is, victims are rarely either sympathetic or hateful enough to make the investigation of their murders truly gripping. Lorely Pelling is an exception: an eccentric old witch, as "queer as two left boots," she remains at the centre of the story long after being bumped off, and in order to catch her killer, Detective-Superintendent Mike Yeadings of Thames Valley Police must understand her relationship to the rest of her community.

DCI Webb, the investigator in *The Lily-White Boys* by Anthea Fraser (Collins, £12.99), is a painter, not a poet, and a sensitive lover, not a marital teddy-bear, but otherwise not much different to the rest of his species. I found Fraser's narrative rather plodding, and her suspects languid, and difficult to tell apart.

Coincidentally, however, she too has the ability to create intriguing corpses. The White twins are a pair of likely lads; window-cleaners, minor football hooligans and burglars. They are found dead in a van outside the home of respectable local boutique owner Monica Tovey – an odd choice of dumping-ground, but one which doesn't, at first, seem to have any particular significance. But Monica's family is involved in art-importing, and we know from the prologue that shortly before dying the Whites had an unfortunate encounter with a low-flying aircraft.

The anonymous city patrolled by DI Mike Fletcher is a long way from the olde English village of Murder-on-the-Cosy: it's a violent, grim place, host to brutal killings, pathetic motives, and greedy cops. Hugh Miller wrote the bestseller *Ambulance*, and *An Echo of Justice* (Gollancz, £3.50) is his first crime novel. I'm sure he will quickly attract a cult audience, somewhere on the border between despised genre fiction and respectable middlebrow entertainment.

Much as I enjoy a good body-in-the-library, it refreshes the palate to turn to a novel which deals almost casually with the widely-accepted, but rarely discussed, fact that adherence to the letter of the law may not be the norm in inner-city cop-shops; and that they are not the safest places to be if you're an inarticulate petty villain with information you are reluctant to share. When one such unfortunate, suspected of murdering a policeman, is found defenestrated, Fletcher's investigations lead unsettlingly close to home – or rather, station.

The second Mike Fletcher story, *Skin Deep* (Gollancz, £13.99), is a more conventionally-plotted mystery, with a good final twist. In this case, the deceased is a young man, whose death seems to be linked to a racist conspiracy against Asian businessmen. Both books are violent, spare, and magnificently pacy. Miller's dialogue, atmosphere, and eye for the brief details which distinguish characters, are first-rate. Best of all, his detective is a properly-realized individual, memorable and likeable. He's nicknamed the Archangel, because "in the Christian faith the Archangel Michael is the chief opponent of Satan and his angels. In the Koran he's an Archangel too – Michael, the champion of the faith ... Mike Fletcher has a purity and directness of purpose that's unusual in a policeman. It can rise above the messy inadequacies of the law, if it has to. He denies all this, of course."

Another, very different, new series begins with *The Raphael Affair* (Gollancz, £3.50), and continues in *The Titian Committee* (£13.99), by Iain Pears. It involves the cases of the Art Theft Squad in Rome; not being particularly interested either in Italy or painting, I was surprised by how much I took to Pears's first two crime novels.

Rather than one detective, we have here an investigative triumvirate; a triangle which, if not quite eternal, is at least very nicely balanced. The head of the squad is General Bottando, a career cop, civilized and intelligent, who has to spend most of his time fighting political battles to defend his territory against rival departments, in the permanent chaos of Italy's governance. His assistant is Flavia di Stefano, a beautiful and brilliant art expert. They are helped and hindered by a somewhat ineffectual young English academic, Jonathan Argyll.

In both books, art fraud leads to murder; in the first, rather slowly, and in the second, speedily and bountifully. The background tends to overshadow the crime, and the novels work better as light-hearted capers than as detective stories, but, in this instance, that's not intended as a criticism. Readers will particularly enjoy wondering whether Jonathan and Flavia are ever going to get round to having sex; they become good friends, but their very different characters irritate each other. She doesn't intend to make the first move, and he probably isn't capable of doing so. The general assumes that his two colleagues are already at it – "Bottando, something of a romantic at heart, beamed at him in a way which indicated he had misunderstood the situation entirely." Pears has made a promising start to what could turn into a very successful sequence of novels.

(Mat Coward)

## More crime fiction reviewed by **Chris Hampshire**

Janet Neel's crime fiction has received considerable praise from the quality press, more, I suspect, because of the personality and career of the author than for anything very exceptional in the books themselves. By any standards, Neel's career has been exceptional, and for a woman it is still quite extraordinary. Now a director of Charterhouse Bank, she is a qualified solicitor whose past jobs have included constructing war games for the US Defense Department, industrial relations manager for a construction company, specialist in company rescue work at the Department of Trade and Industry, and restaurateur. She has had three novels published, and she is the mother of three children. Whew.

So – what of the books? In the best tradition, they feature a serial detective and sidekick. Her latest, *Death of a Partner* appeared some months ago from Constable at £12.99, and the second, *Death on Site* is published in paperback by Penguin at £3.99. Neel has chosen to



make her hero a policeman, a Chief Inspector in fact – John McLeish. But McLeish is a dull dog, and the true focus of the novels is his relationship with Francesca Wilson, “a fast-rising star in the Department of Trade of Industry.” Francesca, whom Neel has described as an idealized version of herself, is a kind of Conservative feminist, the kind who believes women with talent will get to the top if they try hard enough. She is the pet of the DTI. She has four gifted but feckless brothers whom she mothers. She knows, literally, everyone, to an extent which can put a strain on the reader’s credulity. Janet Neel’s own experiences are put to good effect in her depiction of the lives of building-site workers and civil servants, and in fact it is here that the strength of the novels lies: Neel’s novels have something of the seamlessness between life at work and at home that is more characteristic of American fiction.

I cannot claim to have enjoyed *Death on Site*. There are too many poorly-differentiated characters, the writing can be clumsy, and Francesca comes across as McLeish’s sprightly Girl Friday. It has something of the precious high spirits of Dorothy Dunnett’s *Dolly* novels, the same self-congratulatory qualities, and Francesca’s life in particular seems clanish and claustrophobic. McLeish seems to think so too, and in *Death of a Partner*, a far better novel, he revolts against playing second fiddle to her brothers, with refreshing results. The murder mystery in the two novels is competently worked through, but I would like to see Neel try her hand at non-genre fiction.

A new Barbara Paul novel is an event to look forward to and her latest in paperback, *He Huffed and He Puffed* (Pan, £3.99) is no disappointment. Paul specializes in first-person narratives, and her narrators are frequently more-or-less ruthless characters who may or may not be actual criminals. Readers of Agatha Christie’s *And Then There Were None* will remember that it tells of a group of men and women, each with something to hide, who find themselves marooned on an island, being picked off one by one by an unknown assailant. It is not only in its children’s story title that Paul’s new novel recalls the vintage Christie. Big Bad Wolf financier A.J. Strode unsuccessfully pressurizes the “three little pigs,” a violinist, a playboy and a ship owner, to sell him their shares in a bottle-making company. He needs only one block of shares, and each little pig has, or seems to have, a guilty secret, yet each resists his threats.

So Strode invites them together to his New York home with a Machiavellian plan to persuade them that one of them must sell his or her shares if they are all to retain their freedom. The story is skillfully told by the participants themselves, yet the interesting question of whether the little pigs are guilty or merely com-

promised is left unresolved until near the end, and Paul ingeniously transforms the last third of what has so far been a psychological thriller into a miniature murder investigation – an investigation, incidentally, which sees the welcome return of Detective Sergeant Marian Larch. Another virtuoso performance from Paul.

**T**he *Manson Curse* from the late Dell Shannon can be highly recommended to fans of the 1940s and 50s thriller. Set in 1959, and surely written not long after, the novel is published by Gollancz at £13.99. The narrator is Harkness, an American journalist on holiday in Cornwall, who runs into an old friend, Richard Manson, and becomes drawn into the tense relationship between Manson and his mysterious wife, young son and older sister. Manson believes that, thanks to an ancient curse on the Manson family, his son will escape an early death only through the utmost vigilance on the part of those around him.

The novel opens unpromisingly with Harkness’ arrival at one of those isolated country pubs where the locals go quiet when the stranger walks in, then mutter among themselves about curses and werewolves. Harkness himself comments towards the end of the book that “It started out like a ghost story. And ended like a detective novel.” Such self-conscious references to the art and craft of writing – Manson is a novelist – come thick and fast, yet the story has a filmic quality: one watches it, almost. Here is our introduction to Manson’s wife: “pale matte-complexioned oval face with sleek-plucked brows, a mature painted mouth, lengthened dark eyes; soft blue frock so simple that it said Money, sleek

silk slender legs and high heels. The voice was creamy and smooth, and she gave me a slow smile.” This is a stylish period piece, and many cigarettes are smoked and much Human Jungle-style amateur psychoanalysis is practised before the novel moves to a genuinely suspenseful double conclusion.

Hillary Waugh won the 1989 Mystery Writers of America Grand Master award. His 1952 novel, *Last Seen Wearing...*, was voted into 12th place in *The Hatchard’s Crime Companion*, a list of the top 100 crime novels selected by the Crime Writers’ Association. A *Death in a Town* (Gollancz, £13.99) is his latest thriller, and, like the earlier work, concerns the murder of a young woman in a small town. Waugh has not lost his touch. The writing here is fluently, unflamboyantly skillful. Crockford is a well-heeled small town in Connecticut, ostensibly far removed from the crimes of violence endemic in less favoured spots. Yet close below the surface lurk madness and a disruptive sexuality. Yes, Crockford belongs to the same family as its notorious cousins, Peyton Place and Twin Peaks. Like Barbara Paul, Waugh displays a casual virtuosity in telling his tale through the eyes of different narrators, switching easily from taped personal testimonies to the minutes of a church committee and the police commission. Havoc is caused as suspicion falls first on a stranger in town, then local inhabitants. The unhesitating way in which the residents of Crockford point the finger one by one at anybody who is identifiably “different,” damaging their lives permanently, is truly distressing and suggests that Crockford is indeed a crock of something. Definitely worth seeking out. (Chris Hampshire)

## The Root Of All Evil

Some recent splatter and grue is reviewed  
by **Mark Morris**

**C**ontroversy sells. For proof, witness the Sex Pistols, Vinnie Jones, D.H. Lawrence. Kicking out at the establishment, stepping beyond the boundaries of what is considered acceptable inevitably induces an initial outcry of shock, rage, disgust. But paradoxically, hot on the heels of this, comes gleeful admiration, a sense of notoriety, and ultimately material gain. Current bad boy in the world of literature is Bret Easton Ellis. The uproar over his latest novel *American Psycho* (Picador, £6.99) has far outstripped anything that the so-called Splatterpunk have yet been able to provoke.

The controversy began when Ellis’s American publishers, Simon & Schuster, decided not to publish his book at the

eleventh hour, thus forfeiting a reported royalty advance of \$300,000. British reviewers have described the novel as “truly repugnant,” “a snuff novel” and “one of the most nauseating books ever written.” Picador took legal advice before deciding whether to publish or not and concluded that, “though the book covers extreme scenes it is not such that we feel it will deprave and corrupt.” All this, of course, is much-welcomed fuel for the publicity machine. The week I write this, *American Psycho* is sitting high in the British bestsellers’ list.

So is all this hype justified? Perhaps surprisingly the short answer to that is: yes. *American Psycho* is, without doubt, the most disgusting, repellent and distressing novel I have ever read. But if



you think this is a criticism then you're wrong because it is also astonishing, multi-layered and horribly relevant to today's society. For those of you who don't know, it is the story of a Wall Street yuppie who is also a mass-murderer. It is the ultimate novel of the Me-generation, chronicling with absolute accuracy the all-embracing attitude that material wealth is the summit of life's achievement. In such a society poverty, weakness and the physically imperfect are viewed with absolute contempt, and human life is regarded as nothing more than a disposable commodity.

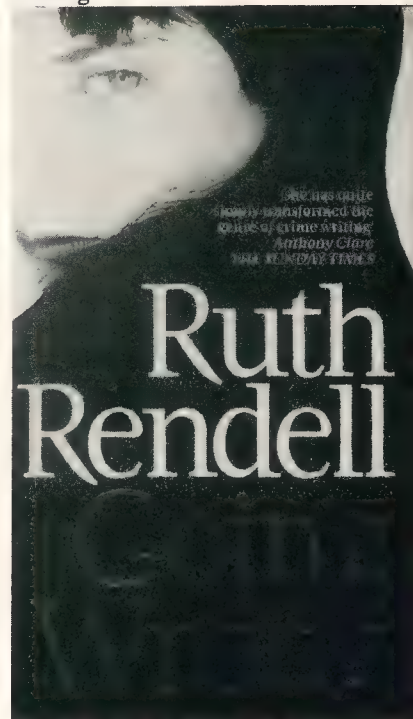
The protagonist of the novel, Patrick Bateman, is certainly one of the most horrifying fictional monsters ever created. His public life is an endless stream of back-biting business meetings, unfinished meals in obscenely expensive restaurants, and vacuous relationships. Surface image is all-important: rules of dress and lifestyle are almost military-like in their rigidity, and any of Bateman's colleagues who contravene these rules are subject to scathing ridicule. From these situations Ellis creates a humour that is as repugnant as it is funny, a hideous irony with the cutting edge of a brand-new razor. Names are interchangeable, mistaken identity the norm. What is frightening here is that Bateman is no different to anybody else. When he confesses his hideous crimes to his colleagues his words are discarded or ignored because they do not correlate to the general speech-patterns of the group.

The scenes depicting Bateman's murderous activities are naturally the ones that have prompted all the controversy. It is not difficult to see why. Told in first person they are shocking, protracted, casually sadistic, disgusting, depraved. Bateman tortures and kills men, women, children and animals without compunction. Before I read *American Psycho*, written fiction had never before succeeded in making me feel physically sick. Some of these scenes, however, are almost unbearable. It got to the stage where I was dreading them, particularly towards the end. When I finally finished the book I felt a huge flood of relief, and a desperate urge to read something light, frothy, life-affirming. Having said that, *American Psycho* is a major achievement, succeeding on almost every level. It is intense, harrowing and often nauseating, but if you can endure it then I recommend that you read it.

**T**he character of Guy Curran in Ruth Rendell's *Going Wrong* (Arrow, £4.99) is strikingly similar in many ways to Patrick Bateman, and some of the themes she explores are not a million miles away either. However, what is different, and wildly so, is Rendell's approach to her subject.

Curran is a self-made man, though one whose wealth has come largely from drug-dealing and other nefarious pursuits. Like Bateman he sets great store

on material wealth for its own sake, believing that not only does money symbolize success, but that it automatically demands respect and necessitates good taste. He is intolerant to the extreme, refusing to accept the views and lifestyles of others if they contradict his own. He is sexist and racist, and ignorant with it. He is also obsessive, psychotic, thoroughly unlikeable and wholly fascinating.



The novel, though told in the third person, is seen purely through Curran's eyes. It chronicles his obsessive love for an old girlfriend, Leonora, whom he meets for lunch every Saturday. Curran refuses to accept that Leonora no longer loves him; he believes that her entourage of family and friends are corrupting her mind, refusing to allow her to express her true feelings. When Curran discovers that Leonora is to be married to someone else, "a ginger-haired vegetarian dwarf," his obsession climbs to ever-escalating heights in his determination to rescue Leonora from what he perceives as intolerable family interference.

*Going Wrong* has a beautifully-balanced plot which is complemented by elegant writing and a thoroughly believable main character. Whereas Ellis chooses to depict Patrick Bateman in a bold and purposely heavy-handed manner, Rendell here opts for the delicate touch. The prose is subtle and understated, and yet for all that the deficiencies in Curran's character are evident in every paragraph, every sentence, every word. His bigotry is expressed through a logic that on the surface is quiet, considered, reasonable; it is only the reader who realizes how warped Curran really is. We feel the need to tell somebody but we can't; we're merely outsiders looking in. *Going Wrong* is Ruth Rendell at her masterful, mesmerising best.

**F**rom human monsters to supernatural forces, and *Reborn* by F. Paul Wilson (NEL, £4.99). This is the first time I've read any of Wilson's work and I have to say I'm disappointed. *Reborn* is okay, but no more than that. It is an *Omen*-ish story about the resurgence of ancient evil. The writing is competent, if a little awkward in places, and though the characters are good they are let down by a dated and rather humdrum plot. There is a major twist half-way through the book which, though at the time I felt was a bold and impressive move, ultimately proves detrimental to the novel's structure. *Reborn* is apparently a sequel to *The Keep*, which reliable sources inform me is terrific. What is perhaps most alarming about *Reborn* is that it simply fizzles out at the end like a faulty firework. Unless I'm much mistaken, my guess therefore would be that another book in the series is in the offing. If that's the case, then I have to admit it's a rather depressing prospect.

Back in issue two of *MILLION* I reviewed *Adventureland* by Steve Harris and expressed an eagerness to read his second novel, *Wulf* (Headline, £14.95). Well, now I've read it, and I'm delighted to report that I wasn't disappointed. *Wulf* is every bit as exuberant and energetic as *Adventureland*, though far more original and ambitious. It's a rural horror novel which intertwines various strands, most notably an ancient evil that resides in a blighted field called God's Teardrop, a creature called a Wulf which exists outside time, and an epidemic of human BSE (mad cow disease) which is exacerbated by the awakening evil.

The cast of characters in *Wulf* is dauntingly large (a whole village-full in fact), but Harris handles them, for the most part, with admirable dexterity. They are surprisingly well-drawn too, unusual in a novel of such scope and such unrelenting pace. Far more than he did in *Adventureland*, Harris shows his adroitness at mood-manipulation. Set-pieces are, by turns, funny, disturbing, scary, whimsical. There is outrageous and original imagery here: a talking garden, a man made of ants, a monkey which materializes on a character's left foot and urges him to commit acts of arson. Perhaps there is a suggestion at times that the novel contains *too much*; Harris is an impressive juggler but there are moments when he threatens to drop all his balls. Some of the weirdness is unexplained, and – as happened in *Adventureland* – the plot is often advanced by characters having bolt-from-the-blue revelations that are unsatisfactorily explained away as by-products of the supernatural milieu. One final point I want to make is that Harris needs to watch his continuity. In the proof copy of the novel that I read there was a major continuity error half-way through the book that severely impaired my enjoyment.



Another young writer on the up and up is Christopher Fowler. His new novel *Rune* (Arrow, £4.99) is his most consistent and impressive piece of work to date. The book was inspired by M.R. James's story "Casting the Runes," and Jacques Tourner's cinematic adaptation, *Night of the Demon*. Fowler convincingly drags the idea into the 1990s, marrying ancient curses in the form of runic sym-

bols to corporate multi-media marketing and modern technology. As well as being an effective and enjoyable horror story, *Rune* is also a love story and a cautionary tale for our times. The characters are engaging, the humour delightful and the supernatural set-pieces strong. The writing style in *Rune* is far more consistent than in Fowler's previous novel, *Roofworld*, which – though an impressive

debut – was somewhat haphazard in its execution. *Rune*, though, maintains its vigorous narrative drive to the end, aided by a smooth, polished prose that seems effortless. Perhaps a little too gentle to be truly disturbing, *Rune* is nevertheless a hell of a good book. I recommend it unreservedly; it's just the thing to cheer yourself up with after reading *American Psycho*. (Mark Morris)

# Monsters

The process of taking an extant work of fiction and further mining its potential – whether producing a sequel, a rethinking or an elaboration – is especially suited to the gothic horror genre, with its collection of passed-into-the-language characters and stories. The archetypal tales of Frankenstein, Dracula or Godzilla exist in so many versions – as a usually literary original is filtered through film, television, comics, Aurora glow-in-the-dark hobby kits and Forrest J. Ackerman's pun-measled prose – that it hardly seems as daring or dangerous to add one more to the process as it must do to anyone tempted by the prospect of *The Sons of the Brothers Karamazov* or *Hamlet II: A New Beginning*, or even commercially-dictated instalments of the Sherlock Holmes, V.C. Andrews or Margaret Mitchell sagas. The great monsters have been raked over time and again, most recently by Brian W. Aldiss, following up his bright and peppy *Frankenstein Unbound* with the considerably more uncertain and slapdash *Dracula Unbound*, and even current genre masters like Stephen King or Anne Rice are prone to fashioning novels like *Salem's Lot* or *The Mummy* as tributes to turn-of-the-century Bram Stoker fictions.

Valerie Martin, in *Mary Reilly* (Black Swan), and Susan Kay, in *Phantom* (Corgi), both take care only to dip a toe into horror, establishing themselves as writers caught somewhere between history, literary criticism, romance and interactive fiction. Martin takes R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Kay plumps for Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of the Opera* – both rewarding but sketchy novels less familiar in their original versions than in numerous and varied reworkings, and they both – unlike Andre Norton and Robert Bloch in *The Jekyll Legacy* – opt not to do simple sequels which resurrect their monsters from preordained death, but to take a new approach to the story. Martin practically ignores the bulk of Stevenson's text to retell the story from the point of view of Mary, a servant in the Jekyll household who never quite

comes to the conclusions that the reader, previously acquainted with the plot, must take into the book. And Kay elaborates on the three-page biography of Erik, the freakish Phantom of the Opera, that crops up towards the end of Leroux's novel, going back to tell of the character's birth, boyhood, travels and relationships up to and including the events of the original. Both choose to honour their inspirations by scrupulously not questioning the established facts of the originals, which means that both novels falter minutely in their climaxes, as Mr Hyde and Erik both suffer the almost throwaway deaths their originators bestowed upon them, with Kay choosing to cap it with a final, new-minted twist that, perhaps unintentionally, smacks a little too much of the flippant endings common in so many modern monster movies, even if it does play out to far different emotional ends.

As befits the differing scopes of the tales, Martin's is a less showy novel than Kay's. *Mary Reilly*, mostly narrated by the heroine, is a quiet, subtle, apt and psychological approach. For Mary, Dr Jekyll is a distant but kindly and concerned figure, and the book is quite touching as it establishes how he comes to stand in for the absent father – a brutalizing drunkard – she has been fleeing from, although we can add in, thanks to our knowledge of what is "really" happening, the ambiguity that the book so cleverly thinks through, allowing us to see the Hyde in Jekyll and, by reflection, to realize that the heroine's family circumstances are a good deal more complex than she ever realizes. Perfectly in period in its tone and remarkably restrained, this is unquestionably the deeper of the two books, but Kay's fine, full-blooded work – which recently won an award for romantic fiction, which perhaps limits its multi-genre approach – is by far the broader, tackling a subject large enough to straggle across four or five countries and most of the 19th century, as it follows Erik from his birth and Elephant Man-ish childhood in France through an appren-

ticeship to a master mason in Rome – those more familiar with the films than the novel will be surprised to find that the Phantom's first love was architecture and not music – and a period as a magician-court favourite-designer-of-labyrinths for the Shah of Persia, before it homes in on Paris and traces the central character through the construction of the Opera House – the Paris Commune is a brief distraction – and the plot of the Leroux novel, which is about the dying fall of a man who, the author suggests, was once a far more spirited and active sort than the melancholy recluse who drops chandeliers and gives singing lessons.

While Martin opts for a split-level approach whereby she writes as if she were the 19th-century Mary and trusts the modern reader to add a hundred years of learning to the text, catching hints Mary passes by, Kay boldly combines sensibilities and points of view, doubtless because her characters are so extraordinary they can hardly be expected to conform to the standards of their times. Switching from Erik's first person to accounts by other characters – most notably his pretty but petty mother and the mysterious Persian who acts as a *deus ex machina* for Leroux but is a fully realized and fascinating character here – *Phantom* is full of historical detail and avoids obvious anachronisms, but Kay allows her monster to be more complex than Leroux could have allowed, creating a memorably abused, brilliant and alienated Erik who confidently combines all the impossible traits and skills Leroux gives him, but also emerges as the tragic figure subsequent films and interpretations have tried to superimpose on the original monster. Both authors provide a 20th-century gloss on 19th-century originals – actually, Leroux first published in 1911 – and also offer female rereadings of aggressively masculine texts, perhaps most significantly rejigging their subject matters so the central stuff of the stories is that their monsters are not to be feared but to be understood and, finally, loved.

(Kim Newman)



# Exactly What a War Story Should Be

I don't think I've ever enjoyed a war story as much as I enjoyed Derek Robinson's *Artillery of Lies* (Macmillan, £14.99) – but then, you don't often see war stories written to such an extraordinarily high standard, or with such vigour and humour. Robinson's seventh novel (a sequel to *The Eldorado Network*) reads as if *The Good Soldier Švejk* had been translated by Spike Milligan, researched by Jack Higgins, and plotted by John le Carré.

The novel is based on the true story of Juan Pujol Garcia, one of the most extraordinary characters of World War Two, a Spaniard who won both an MBE and an Iron Cross. Born in Barcelona, Garcia disliked the anarchist spirit of his home town during the Civil War, and spent a year in hiding. He escaped to join the communist International Brigades, deserted to Franco's Fascists (apparently because their rations were superior), and ended the war without firing a shot.

When his brother fell victim to the Gestapo in 1940, in occupied Paris, Juan, now a hotel manager in neutral Madrid, offered to spy for the British. They weren't interested, so he went to the Germans instead, who hired him, and gave him money with which to establish himself in England. In fact, he settled in Lisbon, where, with a railway timetable and a tourist guide to Britain, he set up an imaginary network of sub-agents throughout the UK. His frequently absurd, and always fictional, reports were swallowed whole by the Abwehr, which considered him amongst its most valuable assets.

Eventually, MI5 noticed the effect he was having on German strategy, belatedly recruited him, and moved him to England, where he spent the rest of the war misleading the Nazis under British direction. He died in 1988; as a final twist, it's now thought by some that his British case officer may have been an agent of Stalin.

*Artillery of Lies* begins when Luis Cabrillo (Robinson's version of Garcia) arrives in London to start his work for the allied war effort. Installed in Rackham Towers, a Victorian pile, he is accompanied by his sometime lover, Julie, and an Intelligence minder, Templeton. Their varied attitudes to life are neatly summarized by their reactions to Rackham Towers: "Unusual place, isn't it?" Templeton said. 'I'm told the architect shot himself.' 'Before or after?' Julie asked. 'In my country,' Luis shouted at them, 'in Spain, we would pay our enemies to come and bomb a thing like this.'"

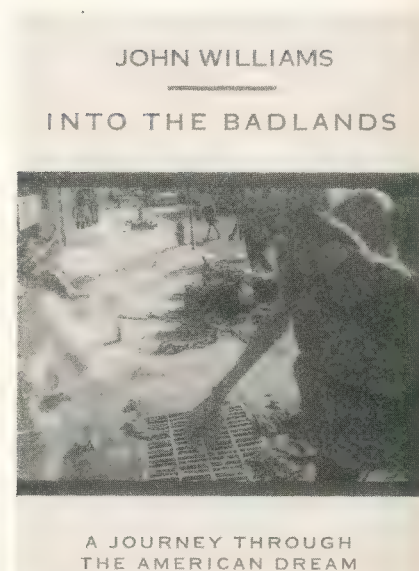
All the characters in this complicated, superbly organized story, are convincing and fascinating. I first noticed Derek Robinson in the 1970s, through his well-observed guides to the patois of Bristol – "Bristle." Even they, slight things

though they were, were minor comic classics; there's nothing minor about the status of this marvellous book. It's exactly what a war story should be – funny, horrible, exciting, and disrespectful. (Mat Coward)

## The Evil That People Do

John Williams' *Into the Badlands* (Paladin, £5.99) achieves a remarkable fusion of travel writing and crime fiction. In the summer of '89 he donned a baseball cap and took off for the States to search out the mythical America of James Crumley, James Ellroy and Gar Anthony Haywood among others. The resulting collection of interviews and insights meld to make Williams' first book – a piece of journalistic non-fiction – at least as disturbing and mesmeric as the popular fiction of some of his interviewees. What makes you read this book in one sitting is partly Williams' use of a skilful imitation of a hard-boiled PI style to write about the cities and the people he encounters, partly the fact that he is talking to some of the world's finest confabulators, but mostly it's down to the appeal of Williams' sharply droll commentary on crime fiction and writers and his own somewhat pitiful predicament as a penniless traveller living in a string of roachy motels.

Williams' storytelling takes place against a kaleidoscopic backdrop of everywhere you've ever heard of State-side – from Miami's sleazy South Beach, to the white painted ghost town of Isleta Pueblo in New Mexico or Detroit's transvestite club "Backstage." His journey is punctuated by some fifteen conversations with writers – an attempt to find James Ellroy's LA or Sara Paretsky's Chicago – but ultimately it is John Williams' US which unfurls and encircles the reader to the very last gasp. His journey becomes a series of postcards from the edge of a dark and distinctly alarming world. What might have been simply a succession of innocuous interviews turns into a penetrating exploration of urban American society, racial politics and popular culture. And what saves the book from being a diatribe is Williams' oscillation from glee to horror at what he has undertaken and a total absence of pretension – to the point that we often cringe in embarrassment for him. At times he seems naive. There are other moments when he



displays a peculiar gnomish wisdom. We meet an odd little Englishman cast adrift in a world peopled by literary giants, poseur waiters and psychopaths:

"Forty minutes later I've wound down a lot of country roads and still haven't reached Mamou. My petrol gauge is reading empty and the afternoon is definitely drawing in. And I'm just waiting for the car to stop moving and the funny guy with the chainsaw and the face that looks as if it's made of leather to come by and take me to meet his family. Or, to put it another way, it's getting mighty backwoods round here."

He finds himself exposed to the reality of crime-ridden America – driving over fresh human blood on the highway in the daytime or hearing the sound of gunshot just a few blocks away – and confronts us with the make-believe violence that drips from the pens of his subjects.

Williams is at his best when he likes the writer and the writer gives him enough time to go beyond the limited exchange of a formal interview. He chases James Crumley – "easily cast as



the Hemingway of the detective novel... a big bearded bearlike man who loves to drink and raise hell and talk about literature" around the bars of Missoula, Montana. When he finally catches up with Crumley they drink several crates of beer and then limber up for a day or so more on tequila with beer chasers before the tape recorder is even turned on. When Williams, weighed down by a hangover of Peter Fallow-like proportions, is finally able to extricate an interview from the man Crumley he starts to talk to Williams "in English-professor mode." But this matters little because all the incidental stuff beforehand has more than satisfied our curiosity about Crumley's passions and desires.

But this book is as much about the nature and process of writing in general and crime writing in particular as it is about the gulf between the American dream and the nightmare. It is sprinkled with samples of crime writing and Williams invites us to look at the States through the filter of the writers' words and ideas. Crumley, momentarily in English-professor mode, takes the opportunity to debate the ever-irksome question of the value of the novel versus crime fiction. He's talking about his thriller *The Last Good Kiss* which describes the south Texas he's been trying to write about since the 1970s:

"On rereading it I discovered I couldn't see why I stopped, so I went back to it. I suppose at the time, because of a certain feeling that you get sometimes in academic circles that detective novels are a lesser form, I felt like I was giving this novel short shrift by using it as a detective novel. I no longer feel that way; I no longer not only do not have the notion that the serious novel is more important than the detective novel, I can't remember why I ever had that notion. Must have been crazed, ignorant or stupid to have fallen prey to the cheapest kind of intellectual snobbery."

If Crumley, as we also discover, has come round to the view that the detective novel is a useful device in dissecting modern-day America, it's apparent that Williams' choice of writers also attempts to reflect something of the panoply of contemporary views. His shrewdest observations and best interviews pivot on the particular social and political issues which are redefining and shaping the US of George Bush.

In LA he meets Gar Anthony Haywood, a thirty-three year old black American whose first novel, a private-eye tale called *Fear of the Dark* had just (at the time of writing) come out. It's set in the giant ghetto of South Central LA and although Haywood, the son of an architect, grew up in black suburbia, he clearly wants to establish his knowledge of ghetto life – not so much the geography of it as the feeling of being kindred with other black people: "...even though I've never experienced genuine

poverty, I think in some way I can relate to it. The factors that are holding black people down in the ghetto are the same pressures that apply to all of us. All you're talking about is a difference in degrees. I don't feel that I had to fabricate any of the emotion."

Haywood's PI, Gunner (older, shorter and balder than Haywood – "a PI in LA who was not going to come off as John Shaft, who was not going to be a typical soul brother"), looks at issues of law and order or a changing political climate not simply from the alienated distance his PI role requires but also from the perspective of a black man: "He was living in an age in which conviction to causes was out of vogue and apathy was often confused with open-mindedness. The only line that remained indelible between men was the law. Corruption was blurring that line more every day... but the illusion of just men waging war against the forces of darkness was still intact in the realm of law enforcement, and for Gunner the lost lamb, an illusion seemed good enough." (*Fear of the Dark*)

Into the *Badlands* is filled with moments of acute discomfort and you can almost feel Williams' exhaustion after travelling and asking questions solidly for two months. There are few more gruesome moments than when Williams is forced to put on a striped maroon polyester tie and a too-tight black synthetic jacket in order to be suitably attired for a fancy Boston café where he is meeting George V. Higgins. But Williams' worst moment comes when he meets Sara Paretsky who "scared the

hell out of me when I met her outside my hotel on my first morning in Chicago." We find him wearing too many clothes for a sunny day with residual alcohol swirling in his blood making him sweat like a pig. She arrives purposefully "in huge shades and a mass of frizzy hair." The interview proceeds somewhat stickily until, at last, the conversation turns to feminist politics and how it should influence the writing of a mystery novel.

The two greatest pleasures of this book are in delving inside the lives, minds and sometimes the hearts, of the crime writers and in criss-crossing the grisliest quarters of North America's urban sprawls with a guide who ponders over everything from a glitzy mall to a vibrator museum. Travel writing works best when you suffer with the writer, and Williams relays his disgust and his relief with equal ferocity. And, when it is all over, the reader is left with a sense of having learned a lot and a faint sadness; John Williams finds the Badlands he went looking for, not only in the fictional worlds of the crime writers, but all around:

"And at this point I begin to feel, not afraid precisely, but sick maybe. Sick of all the baseball caps that say, 'Shit happens' and of the gun shops and the sex shops and the bad beer and sick really of all the evil that people do, all the viciousness, and sick at last of being fascinated by it and, worst, of seeing bad things not as bad but as research, as material."

And that's when I knew it was time to go home." (Jessica Bond)

## The Locked-Room Master

John Dickson Carr was recognized as one of the most ingenious of detective-story writers, and certainly the most inventive with the locked-room mystery. He even gave space in *The Hollow Man* (1935) to allow his detective, Dr Gideon Fell, to step out of the novel and lecture on the subject, discussing at length seven types of locked-room situations. Carr was noted for creating as baffling a scenario at the murder scene as possible, yet devising a solution that was logical but always eluded the reader.

Little has hitherto been written about Carr or his works at any reasonable length, and whilst we await at some future date Douglas G. Greene's biography of Carr, we have S.T. Joshi's *John Dickson Carr: A Critical Study* (Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990). Joshi is a noted scholar in the field of supernatural fiction, especially regarding H.P. Lovecraft, and has completed a significant thesis on *The Weird Tale* (University of Texas Press, 1990), but this is his first detailed foray into the mystery field. Joshi is a perceptive critic, noted for his occasionally eccentric

views, backed by sound reasoning, and apt to be provocative, though always entertaining. In this volume, he keeps his provocation to a minimum, and provides a straightforward study and appraisal of Carr's prolific output.

Joshi has chosen to study Carr's works in two parts. The first section is a subjective view of his books by series character and form, whilst the second takes a more objective overview on his themes and characterizations. The first is the more informative, the second the more revealing. Perhaps the most revealing chapter is on Carr's "Theory and Practise of Detective Writing." Here Joshi considers Carr's abilities as a conjuror of mysteries rather than as a story-teller. Indeed, he highlights flaws in Carr's abilities to maintain a believable narrative because of his desire to intrude into the story in order to ensure fair play in the reader's interpretation of events. Carr's work is occasionally marred by his over-exuberance at his own cleverness, yet despite this, Carr's works are always fascinating. This suggests that Carr's works were popular not so much as



works of fiction or as entertaining narratives, but because of their fascination as puzzles. He established himself as the master of the impossible crime and became supreme in that sphere, regardless of his qualities as a writer.

Joshi also considers Carr's abilities in creating characters, which are invariably caricatures, larger-than-life, but usually delightful, such as the Chestertonian Gideon Fell. Both his characterization and his plot-motifs stand out from the printed page and are instantly memorable, leaving an impression far greater than anything that might otherwise be left by a cleverness with style or language. Joshi concludes that Carr may not have been an adept artist in fiction, but he was "the supreme colourist" in detective fiction.

In addition to his lengthy considerations of Carr's detective fiction, Joshi looks at Carr's other works, including his supernatural stories, historical novels and mysteries, and short stories and plays. The study also has a detailed bibliography, the most thorough I have seen of Carr's writings, marred only by the publisher's lack in highlighting the book titles so that they are easily found. All in all this is a fascinating book, and an excellent introduction to the unmatched world of John Dickson Carr.

(Mike Ashley)

## Stephen King Fandom

Around Stephen King has grown up an industry that produces articles, anthologies, fanzines and critical works as well as Hollywood and TV movies, in direct proportion to his own prodigious output. The fall of the Iron Curtain saw King selling well in the former German Democratic Republic, even as book sales in that vanished nation generally fell. Globally, his sales are close to one hundred million, and first editions have become collectors' items. He is a phenomenon whose success demands explanation, a writer of pulp fiction who can almost-plausibly be presented as a major novelist or poet manqué—and who seems to see himself in just such terms.

**Fear Itself: The Horror Fiction of Stephen King, 1976-1982** edited by Tim Underwood and Chuck Miller (Pan, £4.99) first appeared in 1982, and is a serious attempt to grapple with King as both commercial success story (King contributes his own comments in a piece entitled "On Becoming a Brand Name") and as a novelist. Stephen King enthusiasts tend to the gee-whiz school of writing, so it is refreshing here to find that critical faculties are in working order. Peter Straub, for example, while admiring his friend and collaborator's sense of timing in *Salem's Lot*, describes the style as sometimes sloppy and clumsy. Chelsea

Quinn Yarbro, author of *Modern Tales of the Vampire*, takes the great man to task for his inability "to develop a believable woman character between the ages of seventeen and sixty," while attributing his popularity (everyone needs to explain this) to his sensitivity to and exploitation of mythic archetypes. *Fear Itself* remains a rewarding read, despite the fact that it is now out of date and has been followed by many similar books.

**The Stephen King Companion** edited by George Beahm (Macdonald, £13.99) is a fanzine in hard covers. The cover photo sets the tone with its depiction of a bearded King opening the wrought-iron gates to his mansion—gates that bear a design of spiders—while inside we find him holding the mounted head of a rattlesnake in a crystal ball. Sections include "Stephen King Trivia" and "Fan Letters to Stephen King," and the reader is invited to try out "a self-quizzing yourself as a King fan," and come up with your personal obsession quotient

from one to ten.

King's wife Tabitha has a little three-page section to herself which, though entitled "A Writer in her Own Right," contains only one page of text, the remainder consisting of photographs of the author in her "home office in the Bangor, Maine residence." Here is the enclosed world of the true fan, the literally fanatical fact-grubbing in which self-congratulation is barely tinged with irony. If you can't sleep until you have found out how much longer the made-for-television movie of *Salem's Lot* is than the condensed videocassette version, if you long for information about the "real" Overlook Hotel, the setting for *The Shining*—ask within.

Either of these books would be an appropriate present for the King reader in stages 4 to 10 of obsession with their hero—no, I couldn't resist trying out the quiz. For the rest, the latest book by the master would I think be more acceptable.

(Chris Hampshire)

## An Enduring Icon

**The Many Lives of the Batman: Critical Approaches to a Superhero and His Media** is a collection of essays edited by Roberta E. Pearson and William Uricchio (Routledge/BFI Publishing, £11.95).

Batman editor Dennis O'Neil worries about "hoverers." Usually adolescent males, and unable to separate reality from fantasy, they turn up at comics conventions or bookstores when industry personalities appear. And hover.

"They get a book signed and stand about six to ten feet from you and then dash up again when there's a break in the conversation. They often ask about violence. They keep saying, 'I would kill all the criminals if I were Batman.'"

According to *The Many Lives of the Batman*, O'Neil received a death threat when he made a superhero an alcoholic; and the emotional outpourings following his part in killing off Robin overwhelmed him. "I forgot that there were John Hinkleys out there," he says.

The hovering obsessives are not representative of fans, but their extremism underlines the persuasiveness of the medium. And arguably the most powerful figure to emerge from the form is Batman. *The Many Lives of the Batman*, with its essays and interviews, is billed as the first serious assessment of the Caped Crusader.

"Batman: Commodity as Myth," by Bill Boichel, reminds us creator Bob Kane named two movies seminal to Batman's creation—Douglas Fairbanks' *The Mark of Zorro* (1920), and *The Bat Whispers* (1930), with a murderer assuming a bat-like alter-ego. Other influences

included Doc Savage, The Shadow, and Sherlock Holmes. Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy* inspired the bizarre villains, although Boichel contends they also reflected the rise of fascist dictators at that time. The Joker came not only from the playing card but also a still of Conrad Veidt in *The Man Who Laughs* (1928).

In 1954 Fredric Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent*, which spoke of Batman's "homosexual tendencies," contributed to the establishment of the Comics Code, and the character's effective emasculation. Sales plummeted. The 60s TV series lifted him from the doldrums, although the buffs saw this as a mixed blessing.

Circulation was at an all-time low again in the early 80s, but the direct sales market, instigated by fans, had alternative distribution networks. With retail bottlenecks unclogged, and the advent of Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, and Moore and Bolland's *Killing Joke*, the late 80s saw a resurgence of interest culminating in Tim Burton's movie.

"Notes From the Batcave," the O'Neil interview, conducted by the editors, confirms his approach was predicated on returning to Kane's original premise, and that he sees Batman as an "obsessed loner," not a psychopath.

Explaining how Batman and Superman's personas differ, he neatly cites their environments as reflecting their temperaments: "Gotham is Manhattan below Fourteenth Street at 3 am, November 28 in a cold year. Metropolis is Manhattan between Fourteenth and One Hundred and Tenth Streets on the brightest, sunniest July day of the year."



In Christopher Sharrett's Frank Miller interview, "Batman and the Twilight of the Idols," Miller denies the Batman of *Dark Knight* was, in *The Village Voice*'s words, "Rambo in a cape"; he holds his interpretation was a radical one. In *Dark Knight*, he says, Batman's realization is that he isn't on the Establishment's side any longer because the Establishment is corrupt. But Miller feels the changes he and a handful of others brought about have been perverted by the industry. Batman is back to being "a jerk."

Eileen R. Meehan's "Holy Commodify Fetish, Batman!": The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext" analyzes the corporate and market structures behind the rash of artificial Batmania surrounding the movie, with Warner spending \$10 million promoting its "multiple unit" spin-offs.

"Batman and his Audience: The Dialectic of Culture," by Patrick Parsons, defines the readerships comics attract. It's basically number-crunching. Camille Bacon-Smith and Tyrone Yarbrough also try identifying audiences in "Batman: The Ethnography," this time of the movie. They interviewed people exiting, then broke them down by gender, ethnicity, age, etc. Roughly the same reactions emerged: mild disap-

pointment; thumbs down for Michael Keaton; delight with Nicholson's Joker.

"Same Bat Channel, Different Bat Times: Mass Culture and Popular Memory," by Lynn Spiegel & Henry Jenkins, assesses the interplay between history and memory. Reactions to the *Batman* film, they say a little obviously, are determined by whether viewers were old enough to remember the 60s TV series and pre-*Dark Knight* versions of the character.

"Batman, Deviance and Camp," by Andy Medhurst, offers a homosexual perspective of the phenomenon, putting forward three reasons for Batman's appeal to gays – he was one of the first fictional characters "accused" of homosexuality; the camp TV series; his masculinity.

Wertham's ideas about Batman's supposed gay predilections are demolished. Medhurst argues this view depended on a degree of "audience passivity" among young readers that took no account of their ability to make up their own minds. He also has something to say about Wertham's critics: "Bat-fans have always responded angrily to Wertham's accusation...and the general response has been to reassert the masculinity of the two heroes, mixed with a little indignation. This seems to me not only to miss the point but also to reinforce Wertham's

homophobia...Thus the rush to 'protect' Batman and Robin from Wertham is simply the other side to the coin of his bigotry."

Jim Collins' "Batman: The Movie, Narrative: The Hyperconscious," essentially a film review, generates some heat, little light. "'I'm Not Fooled By that Cheap Disguise,'" by the editors, attempting to define who or what Batman is, finds him mutable as Holmes, Bond or Philip Marlowe. There is no longer a definitive interpretation.

*The Many Lives of the Batman*, despite occasional obscurities, is an absorbing overview of an enduring icon. It would have been interesting to have had more about the dilemma the character's vigilantism offers liberal consciences, and perhaps some thoughts on his future. These omissions don't diminish this informative, largely satisfying anthology.

But what sticks is Andy Medhurst's irreverent, unfashionable defence of Batman as camp hero. Defining camp, he refers to Tallulah Bankhead, who guested in the TV series. Visiting a church, she was approached by a priest swinging an incense burner. "Darling," she whispered, "I love the drag, but your purse is on fire."

(Stan Nicholls)

# Leaving Well Enough Alone

**Pete Crowther** checks out the graphic novel racks and finds that Thomas Wolfe was probably right: you never can go home again!



Pete Crowther

Flushed with the success of his revival of the 1940s comic book character The Flash – which debuted in the September/October issue of DC's tryout title, *Showcase* – one-time SF fan and would-be writers' agent Julius (Julie) Schwartz decided to chance his hand again. The year was 1959 and, though he didn't know it at the time, Schwartz was well on his way to achieving a virtually single-handed revolution of the medium, a revolution later to become known as The Silver Age Of Comics.

Schwartz turned his attention to another character from The Golden Age, this time the magical Green Lantern, and, in *Showcase* 22, dated October 1959 – and thanks to a tight SF-based script from John Broome and beautiful artwork courtesy of Gil Kane – the emerald gladiator flew again. This time GL's alter ego was that of test pilot Hal Jordan called to the side of a dying alien who would, at the end of that historic

first story, bestow him with powers beyond his wildest imagination and appoint him custodian of the galaxy.

The result was a consolidation of the realization of Schwartz's vision. Green Lantern's three tryout appearances in *Showcase* proved immensely popular and paved the way for the final stroke in the master plan: the revival of the legendary Justice Society of America in the collective shape of a new team of updated heroes. It was a testament to the character's popularity that, so soon after his debut, Green Lantern was included in the JLA's first roll-call.

Green Lantern was an oddity as far as costumed super heroes went. For a start, he had no physical powers of his own. All (!) he had going for him was a ring which transmitted his thoughts into actions, often in the shape of enormous green (always green) tongs to catch the occasional falling aircraft, or a huge protective green shield. In fact, the only



thing that the ring was powerless against was anything coloured yellow.

From 1960 until 1972 – the bulk of the last 14 issues comprising the ground-breaking treatment penned and drawn by Len Wein and Neal Adams, wherein one of DC's mainstay peripheral characters was depicted as having a drugs problem, resulting in the story being rejected by the austere Comics Code Authority – Green Lantern flew alone and unhindered. And even then his relegation to the subs' bench was short-lived. In 1976 he returned, under the questionable auspices of writer/artist Mike Grell, to fly again all the way to the massive fictional shake-up afforded by DC's 1986 internal "rationalization." And that could well have been it.

But you can't keep a good man down – particularly when he's such a natty dresser – and, in 1989, DC decided to have another go at retelling the Schwartz version of the Green Lantern myth, this time through the words of Keith Giffen and Gerard Jones and the pictures of Romeo Tanghal and Giffen. However, as is so often the case, it was decided that the original simple tale needed to be embellished for today's fans. The result was a six-issue series called **Emerald Dawn**, which is now available in (albeit flimsy) book format from DC at \$4.95 – around £3.25. Sadly, it's disappointing.

Gone is the carefully constructed plotting, the almost jubilant naivety, of those early *Showcases*. In its stead word-wise is a flurry of the kind of metaphysical one-liners for which Stan Lee and his cosmically conscious board-wielding darling of the airways – and the campuses – The Silver Surfer became (in)famous at the close of the sixties. While on the art front events quickly sank knee-deep in technological panoramas, rampaging robots and a flurry of sound effects the like of which were already passé with Captain Marvel in the 1940s.

Even worse, the original story has been expanded to make it more "relevant." Now, the hapless Hal Jordan is a drunkard, a flying has-been, constantly bemoaning the death of his test pilot father. Heaps of angst drift in and out of the action – largely Marvel-style big-panel slug-fest mayhem – and the book closes with Jordan, now a fully-fledged Green Lantern "policeman" whose interstellar "patch" includes Earth, taking his lumps for an earlier drunk-driving offence and preparing to assume his duties.

The big debut in *Emerald Dawn* – and, for that matter, many other books and magazines available from *all* of the current "comic book" companies – is the absence of any sense of wonder. It seems as though many writers and artists forget – or maybe never even knew – what attracted readers to the medium in the first place.

**H**appily, Alan Moore never had any such problem, and Eclipse's full-colour **Miracleman** books – reprinting (and continuing) the black and white



stories from the series which first appeared in the much-loved *Warrior* comic of the early 1980s – provides further proof (as if it were needed!) of the man's immense talent.

For a start, Miracleman is actually the old Marvelman character created by Mick Anglo in 1954 as a British homage

to the then recently cancelled mainstay of the US Fawcett Comics range, Captain Marvel. Anglo's Marvelman, Young Marvelman and Marvelman Family adventures were voluminously produced over the following ten years or so in small sixpenny black-and-white comics available in huge piles at any good market stall



alongside Australian reprints of Bugs Bunny, Batman and Felix the Cat.

Moore's greatest trick is his disarming ability to be able to inject realism into a series without losing the original flavour of what went before, despite the fact that he makes it completely his own creation. The first volume of his somewhat cathartic continuation of the *Miracleman* (née *Marvelman*) saga – *A Dream of Flying* (\$9.95 – around £6.50) – picks up with a circa-1982 Micky (now plain Mick or Mike) Moran remembering that he is actually *Miracleman*.

In typical fashion, Moore takes the saga and twists it to suit both his own perverse and immensely enjoyable sense of purpose and today's greater need for credibility. He did the same – though to a lesser extent – with DC's *Swamp Thing* when he showed us that Alec Holland was truly dead and gone, and the twig-ridden shambling swamp creature was only a pile of twigs chemically imbued with the immediate pre-death memories of the burning scientist.

In *A Dream of Flying* we – including Moran – learn that his powers are the result of a serum developed (from the wreckage of a spaceship and the corpse of its other-worldly occupant) by a secret government agency. The serum, he discovers, was then administered to Moran and others whereupon the unwilling "guinea pigs" were brainwashed with a series of mental images of fantastic adventures (the contents of some 300 issues of the old *Marvelman* comic) that actually never took place. The images merely served as a kind of dry run or "flight simulator" for when these super-beings could be drafted into action in the Cold War.

Unfortunately, it reached a point where the authorities became concerned they had created a Frankenstein monster destined to be far more powerful than its creators. The solution was a simple one: they arranged for *Miracleman* and his allies Young *Miracleman* and Kid *Miracleman* to be blown to bits in a nuclear blast while investigating a supposedly disabled space station. Problem solved.

Well, not quite. Young *Miracleman* didn't survive but the others did, though without the authorities knowing. *Miracleman* developed amnesia and remained in his Mick Moran identity while Kid *Miracleman* – a.k.a. Johnny Bates – feigned the loss of his own powers and threw his energies into big business. When, after 20 years, Moran's dreams start and he rediscovers his powers – brought on simply by saying the magic word "Kimota" ("atomic" backwards) – Bates sees news coverage of a flying man and gets in touch. During the resulting meeting, Moran realizes that Bates still possesses his powers. But what's worse than the fact that he's lying is that Kid *Miracleman* is now completely psychotic.

The rest of the book and the whole of the next two – *The Red King Syndrome* and *Olympus* (both \$12.95 – around £8)

– unveil the remaining pieces of the story and chart the progress of Moran's life as the most powerful man in existence, culminating in a lengthy and fascinating consideration of the concepts of godhood, creation and afterlife.

The result is a sobering read and one not recommended for the squeamish or the easily offended. Moran's marriage disintegrates because he literally becomes a schizophrenic; the baby his wife bears (reproduced graphically in a chapter titled "Scenes From the Nativity" which, when it first appeared, caused huge levels of controversy in the States) is capable of speech at birth; Kid *Miracleman* beats a hasty and uneasy retreat into his Johnny Bates identity, where the rapidly diminishing good side of his personality wages a clearly hopeless battle with the dominant superhuman psychopath who constantly tries to persuade him to say his own magic word ("Miracleman") and regain his powers; the colleagues of the original creature – from which the serum was derived – arrive and attempt to sort out the damage caused over the past two decades; other guinea pigs are discovered; Bates loses his battle and unleashes, literally, hell on earth in a chapter which takes on the images of Bosch's *Garden Of Earthly Delights*; and, after much consideration, Moran/*Miracleman* assumes his place as the universe's ultimate deity.

Conceptually, the *Miracleman* saga ranks alongside anything Moore has achieved. It is complex, daring and graphically presented, alternating headily between scenes of starkly violent depravity and a visual and lyrical beauty of rare intensity.

Springtime is now widely regarded by S panelologists – that's comics fans to me and you – as the time to take stock of the old collection, and Bob Overstreet's *The Official Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide* (around £9 in paperback, £12 in hardback), now in its twenty-first year, is generally considered to be the bible for information on comic values.

For example, you can discover that the *Miracleman* comics discussed above – which you've carefully filed in plastic Mylar bags and guarded with your life for the past five years – are actually worth no more than you paid for them. (Actually, they're worth less if you take inflation into account.) At the same time, you may be amazed to discover that the first issue of *Emerald Dawn*, also discussed above, is now estimated to be worth \$12 (around £9). Go figure! It just goes to show that, like any investment, comics call for a certain amount of background knowledge... or just plain spawny good luck. It also depends on which source you use to write out your pricetag. Because, at least for the UK, there's now two!

The new regular alternative to the Overstreet guide is Duncan McAlpine's loftily-titled *The Official Comic Book*

*Price Guide for Great Britain* (£6.95). In this tome, *Miracleman 1* chalks up a healthy (if unlikely) £2.95 price tag whereas *Emerald Dawn 1* settles more realistically for £2.40. At most any of the numerous comic marts around the country, however, you'd be unlikely to see either of these comics changing hands for prices that high.

But it's when it gets up to the so-called "key issues" – those comics considered by the self-appointed comics intelligentsia to be particularly relevant and therefore collectible – that the gap between Overstreet and McAlpine occasionally assumes canyon-like proportions.

For example, a near-mint copy of the officially recognized debut of the Superman-Batman team in DC's *World's Finest* (issue 71) is priced at either \$220 or £255 (around \$430). Of course, you pays your money and you makes your choice: it is worth noting, however, that McAlpine is currently supremo of the London-based Stateside Comics retail and import operation.

The bottom line is shop around, and if you're a serious collector or you're thinking about taking it up, either for pleasure or investment, check out Comic Showcase in London where the practice of fair and realistic pricing and grading has become a byword.

Happy hunting. Up... Up... and AWAY!

(Pete Crowther)

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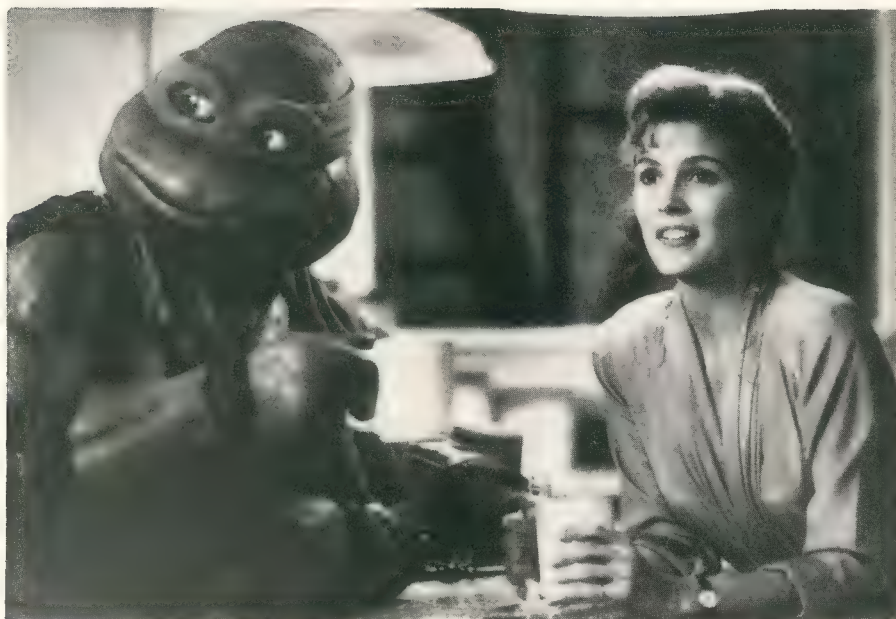
# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

Coming next season: *LECTER – The Chatshow*. Each week a new set of guest celebrities will take their turn in a green velour bucket chair this side of a screen of toughened popemobile perspex, and from within his familiar, welcoming cellroom set the charismatic Dr Hannibal will rape their heads with his unique blend of warped-out mind games and sparkling psychopathic wit. Share your living-room with the nation's newest hero as he hoovers the dark underpsyches of celebrity moms, daytime soap starlets, and faded sportspersons plugging ghosted memoirs! And while you're relaxing at home and letting the Dr's crazy mix of chat, slaughter, and culinary tips get inside *you*, why not snack out on Hannibal's own exclusive licensed brand of spicy dry-roasted human fingernails, or his mouthwatering likeness-copyrighted Wheaty Serial Nut-toes?

Well, I guess you can take the temperature of a nation's backbrain from its choice of current heroes. It's easy to be wrong, but the readout for 1991 so far doesn't suggest that the world is in a mood to honour and obey Robin Hood and the Rocketeer as its big summer role-models, and there could even be some speed bumps to negotiate regarding this new-look niceguy Terminator. The iconic success stories of the year's first half, most of them admittedly holdovers from last year's crop, depend heavily on a triple whammy of personal cool, casual destruction, and above all a snappy line in assertive backchat. Note that MC Hammer, for instance, has dicked out on the second, and is thus no longer a credible model for youth. That Bart dude is still just about in there, despite signs of mythopoeic exhaustion in late episodes. But the field was clearly way open for Dr L to breeze in, despite the undoubted difficulty in developing a viable merchandising concept. The teen sector, in particular, has been rather poorly served for heroes since the Bat thing faded, and in hindsight there's been a clear vacancy for a dangerous guy with a hip and amusing line in sexual violence.

All this would seem to leave last year's heroes on a halfshell stranded wriggling on their backs. But in this country at least the Turtles thing seems if anything to have grown in momentum amongst the core five-to-ten market, and the speedy release of the second movie (in marked contrast to the first's) will



probably arrive in time to catch the wave before it finally breaks. Good news, I suppose, for a film where the pre-title fight is set in a toyshop, the antimutagen is mixed in a Bart Simpson glass, and the Turtles' own merchandising company gets an end credit above the line. All the same, the date-stamp on *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze* is visible enough. Shelf life will not be increased by the lengthy and gratuitous numbers from Vanilla Ice, a phenomenal twerp briefly in vogue way back when the contracts were signed.

In fact, it's notable that unlike the first picture, which mostly shot straight over my head, this one dismantles quite transparently into its constituent codes. Thus the narrative armature is a matrix of comfortably familiar superhero serial motifs. We get to renew acquaintance with old chums like Not Dead After All (no. Q1184b in Arne-Thompson's Comic-Book Supplement), in which the series archnemesis was finally totally permanently killed last time around, like ground into 1-inch cubes and the remains individually posted to 500 different destinations, and now comes back Hideously Scarred and Thirsting for Revenge but otherwise right as rain. There's We Gotta Get Him Out Even Though It's A Trap (one member of the superteam gets himself captured as bait for the rest, and placed at the centre of an enormous set-piece fight scene); Taking Out The Henchmen (our guys work out between showdowns by chucking anonymous

masked thuglets around in stunt panels, all the while swapping balloonfuls of snappy badinage); Freak Against Freak (expendable no-hoper sub-supervillains fabricated *ad hoc* to delay showdown with mastermind); and Holding The City To Ransom (cheese, guys, he says if we don't do another big fight routine he's gonna take out actual human-type civilians instead of inexplicably dissipating his forces of ultimate evil and destruction on a bunch of prancing costumed entertainers). And we end, of course, with the classic Nobody Could Have Survived That finale, where the heroes trudge for home without bothering to pick through the rubble for traces of the body. In fact, only one genre contract is broken. Supposedly this is an Origins Tale, in which strands of retrospective continuity are woven into the gaps in the backstory so far; yet it emerges the secret of the ooze doesn't count, as the heroes are allowed to express a nagging sense that there's something more to their creation than "fifteen years ago you fell into a green colloidal gel that transformed you into your present state." Somehow, it's... incomplete. Somewhere there's a deeper level of explanation.

And of course they're right. The Turtles are the heroic products of a powerful marketing concept for good. Specifically, good is marketed as street cool for kids: an eerily sanitized U-certain view of the human gutters of NYC. Thus in the Turtles' universe homelessness is actually fab fun and consists in setting up base



in luxuriously-appointed abandoned subway trains, conveniently parked in disused stations with all electricals mysteriously functional and only a few ezykleer cobwebs to suggest the veneer of squalor. (This is well judged. I know my absolute number one fantasy at the equivalent age was Blitz Boy in, I think, the *Dandy*, who lived a similar mod-cons lifestyle sans parents, skool &c. in a presumed-bombed department store basement.) In this world, hordes of disaffected youth do turn to gangdom and crime – but the gangs are a kind of rather zippy martial-arts youth club organized and exploited by a single criminal mastermind to seduce morally gullible teens away from the security of the family. Even more brainboggling, the crime these artificially-alienated youngsters turn to is not the high-profit fast lane of drug traffic, of which there is nary a whisper, but the laborious and hopelessly un90s offence of aggravated burglary. In a world where this can pass for the organization of a criminal genius and absolute evil is embodied in silly-suited sadistic halfwits, it seems quite reasonable to be faced with a junior slapstick version of ninjutsu where none of those stylish bladed weapons actually gets used to draw blood, and the key skill is putting on a balaclava and pretending to be invisible.

In other words, what these movies are about is mythologizing the darkness and flaws of the adult world in terms that appeal positively to young consumers. Evil is an extraneous option, the creation not of society but of supervillains, and can be eliminated at source by a simple punching-out. A ritual genuflection towards politicality is provided in *II* by the green subplot, in which our conveniently-coloured heroes take a stand against Shredder's decidedly magenta environmental intrigues. Clearly it is now accepted that the politics of ecology fall within the legitimate orbit of preteen concern; but only so long as the politics of market capitalism are divorced. Thus even though in *II* science (in the person of biotech brainiac David Warner, uncannily good as always) is sufficiently morally weak and malleable to be exploited in turn by both sides, he still manages to rescue his dodgy corporation from the consequences. (Baffling end-of-film newscast about "the mysterious disappearance of TGRI": can you remember any instances of a high-profile biochemicals company "mysteriously disappearing"? Ah well, we knew he was a genius when he proved able to tell the Turtles apart in his very first scene with them. After two whole movies and more lunchbox decals than bad British pizzas, I've still only mastered Raphael, and I'm not even colourblind.

We should just thank heaven the adult world is so much simpler. There lies the joy of **Stephen King's** *Graveyard Shift*, otherwise one of that

dying breed of aspiration-free film versions of the master whose highest budgetary component is probably the story rights, and whose theatrical release is hardly more than a promo gesture for the video launch. For this is one of those vigorously proletarian, drive-in-oriented celebrations of an old-fashioned man's world, where guys talk very slow at one another in very deep Southern voices with their jaw stuck way out, and punctuate conversation by eating fruit expressively at one another; where women are there to wear sleeveless halftops, sprain ankles, and conduct sexual tension between the walking tubes of testosterone who get to do the actual plot.

*Graveyard Shift* is a vigorous working-class allegory about a "college boy" (hoch-*ptoo* – omnes) drifter who signs on at an infested cotton mill with nameless mutant batoid thangs roaming the sub-basement, and with his nemesis the ruthless owner and a hand-picked team of expendables probes down, ever down into the subterranean labyrinth of shunned places on which the profit factory precariously rests. There are lots of (unfortunately rather cute) rats, and a thumping great plot device with a sign to the effect of DANGER: DO NOT FALL BETWEEN THE BLADES OF THIS BIG BAD MUTHA STEEL TOOTHED CARDING MACHINE; while a semi-detached Brad Dourif wanders in and out doing popeyed monologues with god knows what stuffed into his cheeks, and his lower lip curled back from his teeth in the way the underclass do. At the end you're rewarded for your patience with a replay of selected highlights of manly dialogue sampled over a bassline – including the richly poetic "Can't be more than an instant enema by now," whose original context as a comment on the coffee gives way to a whole new resonance. Ah yes, this is life as it is: sweaty, senseless, covered in grime, and long at 85 minutes. Heroes, pah. Only kids and nancies need that stuff.

(Nick Lowe)

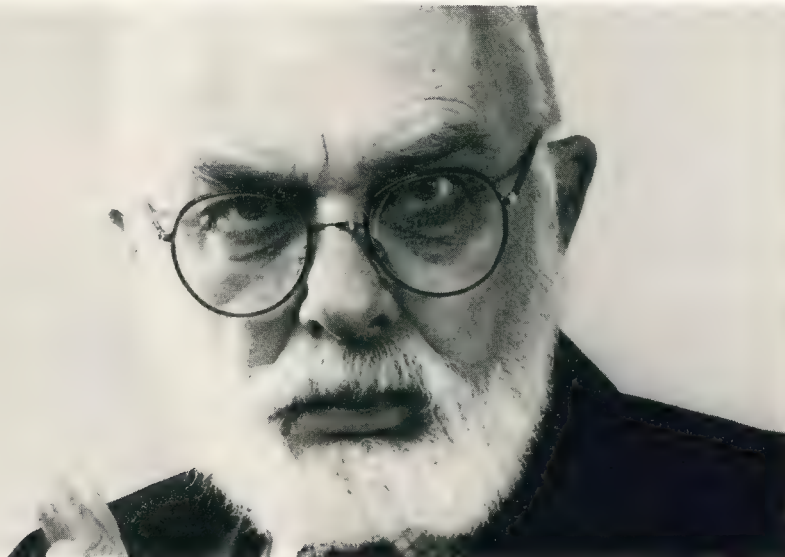
## Tube Corn TV Reviews by Wendy Bradley

**J**ames Randi, *Psychic Investigator* is a wonderful title for a series. I imagined a handsome do-gooding ghostbuster, a sort of cross between Ilya Kuryakin and Tarot, Ace of Wands, but, as usual (check the picture) I was wrong. I am writing this in June and so the broadcast schedule is not absolutely certain but by the time you read it you should have had the chance to see three, maybe four, of the series and will know that, far from being superhero fiction, the series is in fact a kind of non-fiction game-show, in which James Randi, a Canadian magician and professional sceptic, finds some brave practitioners of various psychic and New Age arts willing to test themselves in the face of his scepticism and a studio audience. There are six in the series, on Mediums, Astrology, Psychic Surgery, Dowsing, New Age (Crystals and the like) and Graphology.

The setting is both lazy and dismissive; weird Trekkie music, the eye of Horus everywhere, lots of dry ice and pyramids. An invited studio audience watch as Randi, like a modern day gladiator master, throws the Christians to the lions, or is it the lions to the Christians? Unfortunately what appear to have been heated studio discussions are cut to ribbons in editing so that all we see is the passion, not the provocation, and the programmes appear to generate heat but not a lot of light on their subjects.

**T**here is, however, the *Psychic Surgery* programme. Aside from the casual conflation of "healing" and "psychic surgery" which means Randi speaks as if rubbishing one rubbished the other, this programme is certainly the best of the bunch. However the reason it is the best programme is interesting

James Randi, *Psychic Investigator*





because it throws as much light on Randi's own methodology as on his subjects'. In most of the programmes Randi's guest/victims don't even get their proverbial fifteen minutes of fame as he whizzes them on, tests them out and then pushes them off, but in the *Psychic Surgery* episode he found a star in Stephen Turoff, the psychic surgeon willing to be filmed channelling for "Dr Khan" in the actual performance of his operations.

Most of the techniques demonstrated in the other episodes spoke for themselves – the medium hardly required an analysis of the number of names she tested out on her audience for us to notice her technique was more shotgun than rifle, scattering ideas for people to pick up for themselves rather than targeting tightly on an individual's details. For goodness' sake, I have done *that* one myself, as "Madame Sosostriis the Famous Clairvoyant" reading palms at church fetes with no more psychic powers than a turnip but with wit enough to tailor my "character readings" to the outward and visible signs of my victims' inward and spiritual graces. In the programme on dowsing we can all root with the chap dowsing for an ore sample concealed under one of seven boxes without needing Randi's explanation of the number of guesses one would need if only chance were determining the results. No mediation is required between the demonstrations Randi sets up and ourselves as the audience, and in the end Randi's presence becomes an irritant rather than an assistance.

Turoff, however, is different. The fault of this particular episode is that it is all too polite. A polite woman from the BMA suggests mildly that it might be an idea if people sterilize their instruments before inserting them into people's orifices. Turoff says that Dr Khan could operate with a rusty knife and there would be no danger of infection. At this point politeness is otiose. What the *Psychic Surgery* programme needs is someone screaming "AAAAARGH!!! You put a pair of SCISSORS right up that man's NOSE!!! WHAT is that supposed to DO for him??? WHY did he LET you???" Randi's technique is to let the facts speak for themselves. It doesn't work: at the end of half an hour we don't have enough facts to go on and our own prejudices either for or against remain undisturbed. More often than not I came out in sympathy with the victim, simply because Randi was clearly in control of the format and came over as a bully, arousing the sympathy for the underdog that then gets in the way of any "facts" established against them. Turoff, however, gave back as good as he got and he and Randi didn't even begin to dent each other's self-esteem.

Over the series as a whole I felt it was as if Randi were prodding with a stick into a pond and succeeding only in muddying the waters: but with Turoff he

he prodded something BIG lurking and then backed off from the confrontation. I wanted to see the two of them locked into a room for a couple of hours with a camera running and all pretence of politeness ruled out of order. Now that I *would* pay to see.

**F**inally, a note on some recent video releases. The very early days of Doctor Who are collected in BBC Enterprises Videos: **Doctor Who: The Hartnell Years** (presented by Sylvester McCoy) and **Doctor Who: The Troughton Years** (presented by Jon Pertwee). These are very short (80-odd minutes each) and, although worth seeing, perhaps not worth buying because of the scrappiness of the material. The titles suggest an examination of Hartnell and Troughton's incarnations as the Doctor but in fact the tapes are simply some unconnected episodes from early series which are otherwise no longer in existence. Some of the episodes stand up very well: *The Hartnell Years* has the original pilot, "An Unearthly Child," complete with McCoy pointing out the re-shot bits, "The Wheel of Fortune" (episode 3 of "The Crusade"), and "The Final Test" (final episode of "The Celestial Toymaker"). "The Celestial Toymaker" is one of those series that, if you are old enough to have seen it the first time around, you probably still have lurking in your mental baggage somewhere and it is amazing to see how well the one remaining episode matches up to the disturbing and sinister story I remember, even with the filter of half a lifetime's distance. The Troughton episodes ("The Abominable Snowmen"

episode 2, "The Enemy of the World" episode 3 (Troughton playing the Doctor AND the world dictator) and "The Space Pirates" episode 2) are less memorable of themselves, although Troughton's performance is still charming to watch.

The linking material from McCoy and Pertwee, though, is less successful. The Sylvester McCoy bits are extremely patronizing and irksome, with McCoy dressed as the Doctor but appearing as, apparently, himself, against a background of BBC warehouse space full of Who memorabilia, as if to plead that, in spite of having lost the heritage of irreplaceable early episodes, the BBC can now be relied upon to preserve diligently every dalek and yeti in existence. Unlike Pertwee, who always played the Doctor as himself, McCoy's Doctor was always a performance and it is insulting of him to have abrogated the costume for his own rather than the Doctor's delivery. Pertwee's problem is, rather, that he is *too* aware of the Doctor Who industry and his retelling of convention stories is alienating rather than affection-inducing in this context, since it puts his part in the Doctor Who tradition before us rather than throwing light on Troughton's. On the whole, I could have done without either of them and would have preferred some linking material with a bit of meat on it, like perhaps some interviews with people involved in the episodes themselves as writers, technicians or extras. Oh, and there's a *horribly* groovy version of the familiar dum diddle dum signature tune used to frame both of these videos – are they taking the mickey or what?

(Wendy Bradley)

## Grail Plate Sieve

### John Clute

**Y**ou read a Robert Silverberg novel, first you wash your flaky old human hands. It was, after all, untouched by them. But that is cruel. Robert Silverberg may give the impression that, like the Silver Surfer, being committed to homo sapiens doesn't mean he has to swim in the same pool; but that impression may derive in part from a personal appearance of very considerable polish, of embonpoint utterly without plump, and in part from the glassene pompadour dermis of his fiction. It does not necessarily tell the whole tale. It is not necessarily the case, for instance, that *The Face of the Waters* (Grafton, £13.99), the latest addition to his huge oeuvre, will strike

every reader as heartless. Some may find *The Face of the Waters* not only perfectly oiled but also animate.

I did. I did not. In the end, I couldn't say for sure. On one page, the perfect pellucidity of the prose and the exquisite phased-release timing of the plot felt like ice, like unlife; on the next, the cleaving epiphanousness of the tale bore me into an auctorial embrace that stung with live cold. So I don't know. When I bleed the psychic blood of empathy into the *haut couture* innards of a Silverberg tale, am I being conned? doing all the juice work on my own? Or has the author suffered, too, in his own way, some prior and compensatory psychic bloodletting of the



creative act? If he hasn't, and *The Face of the Waters* is by no means the first of Silverberg's novels which force the question upon one, then my response to having cared about his protagonists and the water world of Hydros when he did not is one of *embarrassment*. I feel he's tricked me again, in public. But I don't know. Maybe he hasn't. Maybe the book is an ice jewel of heartless stagecraft; maybe it is a anguished tale of sexual longing and its fulfilment, an odyssey into transcendence, a love-song to the multifariousness of things alive, an epiphany whose smoothness reflects the power of the gearing. It is, of course, maybe, all these.

We are on Hydros, a water world whose native inhabitants seem to combine ravaging bloodlust and high intelligence. There are monsters everywhere, in the benthos and on the animate beaches that front the floating islands where the resident humans live as tolerated squatters; and all the beasts have eyes which *track* the cast: sad, staring, contemplative. Hydros is pullulant with watching life. For generations, either as convicts or as pilgrims, humans have been making one-way trips to the planet, without any hope of leaving; we are told that the dominant native species forbids any attempt at constructing a spaceport, and we are inclined, at least initially, to allow Silverberg the auctorial privilege of tricking us into forgetting how terribly easily such a diktat would be breached in most novels set far into the future, at a time when humanity has spread across the galaxy.

Valben Lawlor, the protagonist of *The Face of the Waters*, is something like a fourth-generation inhabitant. As were his father and grandfather before him, he is a doctor. Born and raised on Sorve Island, in the midst of a sort of extended family, for there are fewer than 100 humans on the island, he expects to die on Sorve. Though he has slept with most of the women of his own age cohort, he remains bound to Sorve and, having had no significant relations with non-islanders, remains single: exogamy, sanely enough for such a tiny population base, being standard. He is in his middle years. He has officiated at the births of half his fellows. He is loved and needed, he has lived from birth in a tightly knit community in a world of wonders, he knows nothing else. But he suffers – this is, after all, a Silverberg novel – from a deep anomie. His affect is flat. His sexual activities have diminished. He experiences a quickening of the loins when Sundira Thane arrives from another island, but throws no internal switch. He remains a burnt-out case.

Something happens. The main merchant on the island has mortally transgressed the terms upon which the dominant Hydros species allows humans to remain upon Sorve, and the entire community is expelled. They must wander

the face of the waters (one of the meanings of the title) until they sink or until they find another island whose resident Dwellers (or Gillies) are willing to tolerate them. Most of the novel is spent – at times splendidly – on a detailed presentation of the fraught passage Lawlor and his fellow humans make across the broad waters of Hydros, assaulted constantly by a huge variegation of native species, and eyed by them. Lawlor's attachment to Sundira finally explodes in good sex, well and realistically described, at just about the point when it becomes clear that the alpha-male merchant – Delagard – is not after all leading them towards a new island. None, he admits, will accept so huge an importation of humans. He is, instead, taking them to The Face of the Waters.

We are in a Silverberg novel. So we know what's going to happen, almost certainly. The Face of the Waters, we have been told, is a vast taboo island beyond the Empty Sea full of writhing energies, which in any sf novel by almost any of Silverberg's contemporaries could mean quite a few things: that it is a giant ancient spaceship, in which the planet-bound humans may travel once again to the stars; that it is a giant ancient star-gate, ditto; that it is a giant ancient computer, ditto; that it is a giant ancient labyrinth, ditto; that it is a giant ancient *rune* which is bigger inside than it is out, ditto; that it is the giant ancient home of the true Hydrans, in the middle of which the very last of the true Hydrans will pass on to Dr Lawlor the Scroll With Stuff On It in a language clearly allied to Sumerian; that it is a giant ancient battlefield, totally abandoned except for one lonely sentient tank named Roland half-buried in a ruined Dark Tower/spaceship who contains in his memory banks a route to the stars and who has just enough juice left to give a dying salute to the deeply moved descendent of his captain, Lawlor's great-grandad. But we're in a Silverberg novel from the 1990s. The Face of the Waters will be none of these things. It will, almost certainly, turn out to be a locus for transfiguration, for *passing over*; it will offer some sort of transcendence of the burnt-out-case cage of human mortality, something very much like death. This turns out to be the case. Though it would be unfair to reveal the precise nature of the great ancient animate entity (though it will not have been hard for some or most of us to guess), we can say that the details of revelation are inventive, the language glowing and intense, and there's not a hair mussed in the sudden high-tone of telling; that, with all the serenity of a great chessmaster welcoming the final endgame, Silverberg has apprehended once again the vacuum beyond the page for which his whole career is tropic.

But does he give a stuff? *The Face of the Waters* is very much like life, but so is a hologram. Perhaps the book stops

on exactly the note Silverberg intended: in a lustre of effortless dying-into-life. But that perhaps is where praise ends: because it does not stain the mind. After all the perfection of the thing done, a perception lingers on that somehow the texture of the book is somehow pre-masticated, a vat-grown pearl without a grain of sand: traceless. Lawlor himself may represent, to a nicety, Silverberg's own sense of what it might feel like to be trapped forever on a hick island with raw fish and Gillies, but in terms of the life the harried doctor has led, the burnt-case anomie he exudes simply doesn't wash. As Silverberg draws him, this fourth-generation native of a profoundly articulated niche culture is intensely *urban*, and his stream of consciousness exudes the sated renunciation of any internal exile, pores sealed shut; he is a dazed Jew in a final ebb of diaspora, leaking ironies into a spiritual desert; a stymied godling at the end of time; a parched Fisher King at the end of his tether, without a drop to drink. He is, like any of the Graham Greene characters he so comprehensively evokes, an alien. He simply does not *feel* like a native, a dweller, a man who's had his hands on every cock and up every cunt – as Silverberg himself puts it – on Sorve, a lean and wiry figure of considerable physical grace in the depths of a love affair with a lithe, wry, foxy woman of great sagacity who loves him back. He is a baulk – a blank – at the heart of things. And the translucent beauties of Hydros, and the momentary tanga delicacies of the sex, which Silverberg presents with panache and tact, vanish in the mind's eye. And we are left unknowing in the end, the tale shrugged upon us from above, the grail bloodless. Or maybe not?

**N**otes. In *Interzone* 31 (Sept-Oct 1989), Stephen Baxter published a short story called "Raft," and has now expanded it enormously into *Raft* (Grafton, £14.99). It is very very hard sf, and it's great fun, and the cosmogonic precepts of its universe are challenging to grasp, and it's quite quickly told, and it's really dumb about people. Sounds almost perfect. The universe of the book – into which a human spaceship has stumbled many generations earlier – features a force of gravity billions of times greater than back home, which means that nothing of any size can exist without imploding, stars are a few miles across, the weight of the central portion of the Raft itself – which floats in orbit around a tiny nebula or something – makes outlying parts of this wee habitat seem *uphill*, and so on.

The protagonist, young Rees, has grown up in the Belt, a congeries of shacks orbiting a tiny dead star which they mine; and longs to ride a "tree" upsystem to the Raft where he may learn why the universe seems to be dying. As in any good juvenile, this happens. Rees – and everyone else who experiences any





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emotion of any sort – blushes an awful lot. Rees grows up, which makes him blush, learns why the universe is dying, blushes, helps fail to avert a highly predictable uprising on the part of the lower orders, descends into “hell” and rises again armed with new knowledge, leads humanity into a new era around a new nebula, blushes. Baxter describes the physical terms of *Raft* with real love and attention; he is very much less good at making us believe in the culture he has posited; and Rees, whom he leaves in the narrative lurch at almost every point of human importance, is going to have to learn a couple of new ways of expressing himself in the sequel – there could easily be a sequel, the last paragraph is a fine old slingshot, we wait for it.

Odd coincidence: both this book and Silverberg's are about human cultures exiled for generations from Earth; and both end with a symbolic casting into the waters of long-cherished Terran artefacts. Lawlor tosses into the literal sea a congeries of totems; Rees, rather more foolishly, dumps a neat orrery into space. Both are saying goodbye.

**T**riangulate Jonathan Carroll, M. John Harrison and Robert Holdstock, and in the heart-aching dream-created chthonic swamp-with-no-exit-unless-you-grow-up-fast in the middle there you will find Graham Joyce's *Dreamside* (Pan, £4.50), which does not win many points for originality of concept. But it is, in some ways, a beautiful little book. In the 1970s, as university students somewhere in the Midlands (perhaps Leeds), the four protagonists of the book begin a controlled experiment in shared dreaming under the supervision of an elderly professor. The oneirism within their heads battens on a violent sexual passion two of these protagonists feel for one another; and other lithely depicted sways of relationship shape the central section of the novel which is devoted to this period. It ends in something like tears, the elderly professor (beautifully drawn) dead, the affair burned out, the dreamside beginning to threaten.

By the late 1980s, the four students, now in their thirties, find themselves pulled together once again. The plot boils a little at this point, and Carroll is too slavishly evoked, and it becomes a little too neat in the end. But Graham Joyce pulls the reader through the shallow bits, and the filmable bits, and the bits taken wholesale from *spiritus mundi*. *Dreamside* is a welcome read. Unlike the Silverberg, which knows more than it says, *Dreamside* wells up inside itself, and its best passages are dense with what may some day be said, if Graham Joyce writes 300 books. There is more to this book than it can hold, like a sieve. Good.

(John Clute)

## Edginess Paul J. McAuley

**Q**uietly, without fuss, the ghetto walls are dissolving, for the bigger the sf genre becomes the more its edges seem to blur. Many writers, especially the newer ones, are no longer content to fill their genre slot for the rest of their careers. Some have kind of wandered in, and are wandering right back out again. Others aren't even aware of the Lilliputian threads with which the sf community has tried to bind them to itself.

The defenders of pure sf huddle in their high castle, counting quarrels and rationing hard cheese, their slogans fast fading in unwelcome daylight. (“Get sf out of the classroom and back into the gutter where it belongs.” Gee, who wants to live in the gutter? Besides, when we look at the Lords of the High Castle, with their million dollar contracts for rewrites of each other's old novels, we see precious little street-level suss.) But out at the edge, some writers never a part of the genre have latched on to its central concerns, are using them in nifty ways the Lords of the High Castle never dreamed of.

And there's a kind of radicalism on the inside of the dissolving boundary, too. Cyberpunk is only part of it, but at this point it is impossible not to mention Bruce Sterling, since he was the first to put a name to this new not-quite-sf stuff. In an article in *SF Eye*, itself a critical magazine willingly encamped on the intersecting edges of all kinds of rad popular culture, Sterling called this new weird literature *slipstream*, stuff “which simply makes you feel very strange, the way that living in the late 20th century makes you feel strange, if you are a person of a certain sensibility.”

In many ways, slipstream is itself as artificial a category as sf, and a kind of exclusive one too, recognized only by illuminati. And at least one specialist bookstore has gleefully seized upon slipstream as a *category* label useful for shelving all this new not-quite-sf stuff, which brings home the point that publishers and booksellers (and reviewers) have a greater need for literary taxonomy than do writers. Yet there is that blurry area at the boundary. It includes writers who started off inside the ghetto walls but who are now writing about real things in the real world filtered through sf perceptions (Lewis Shiner in *Slam*, Patricia Geary in *Strange Toys*, Lucius Shepherd in *Life During Wartime*). And there are also writers who never were inside the walls, perhaps even aren't more than peripherally aware of them, who give us that sense of slippage, of things being deeper and stranger than their surfaces suggest.

**W**hich brings us, at last, to Thomas Palmer's *Dream Science* (Collins

Harvill, £13.99), which combines the very science-fictional notion of reality's slippery treacherousness with mainstream concern for verisimilitude to generate a text dense in surface detail and deep in ideas.

*Dream Science* begins with a scenario as bleak and intimate as a Beckett stage dialogue. Rocker Poole, WASP everyman, is prisoner in an anonymous office. He is in his pyjamas. There's a stretch of corridor, a toilet. Carpet tiles, suspended ceiling, desks, a computer. His brutal warder, Mac, is his only contact with what he believes is the outside world. There is no door, but somehow Mac comes and goes. Only Mac can log onto the computer. Poole is beginning to lose track of how long he's been there: memories of his life before, his wife and child, his job as investment advisor, are fading. Gradually, he is brought to the realization that the office is a pocket reality. There are thousands of these pockets, fragmented from the consensus reality we call the world, linked by “lines.” Poole has crossed a line but can't cross back, a condition of great interest to the Panlogo corporation, which infests the fragmented realities like a Pynchonesque conspiracy.

Poole is an experimental subject, Mac not his warder but his keeper. His comprehension of his situation parallels our suspension of disbelief. For Poole, reality isn't what he thought it was, and what we thought was a mimetic novel reveals itself to be anything but. By the time Poole becomes convinced of the existence of lines, and when he finally crosses one back to his original reality, we are ready to believe in them too, and believe that Poole may not have quite returned home. Nor has he, for his return infects reality with subtle disintegration: he is a carrier, and in his quest to cleave to his wife and daughter he crosses line after line, returning again and again and at each return degrading reality further.

Palmer evokes Poole's unease subtly and with great skill. Reality cannot be trusted, and yet there is an imaginative concentration on precise detail. Poole's home and his cool yet deeply necessary relationship with his wife, the aisles of an infinite supermarket, the shiver of light on water or a shiver of a line in the air: the real and the unreal are given the same descriptive weight. Here's the moment when Poole slips out of our world for the second time:

Normally, at this hour, even behind closed windows, you could hear noises from outside – kids shouting, a lawn mower, a car going by. Now, as he sat there, it sounded like three in the morning. It was the sort of quiet that allowed him to lie in bed and listen to the low rumble of the freeway to the north. But now even that was missing.

Poole felt like the transatlantic air passenger riding high over the ocean who hears the engines suddenly cut out.



Behind the reassuring cascade of homely similes some strange and terrible change is working. Nothing can be trusted, every surface is a trap, every line may or may not divide worlds. Packaging apart, we know that this is not sf because there is no rationale and therefore no possibility of control (there is a sustained passage where a line is subject to frenetic scientific investigation, but yields nothing explicable, nothing but destructive light). Nor is Rocker Poole privy to any conspiracy to save the world. Pan-Logo remains in the background, except when it is brought out at the end for a convenient *deus ex machina* ending, the only lapse is Palmer's otherwise masterly manipulation. Subtle and fine-scaled, *Dream Science* is a fine imaginative probe into the objectiveness of reality, more disturbing and more powerful because it refuses to come to easy conclusions.

There's always a point in Jonathan Carroll's fictions when the reader realizes that everything isn't as it seems. When something strange rears up through the bright shiny surfaces of his prose, when the thread of fairytale woven into everyday narrative broadens into a pattern. And so in *Outside the Dog Museum* (MacDonald, £12.95), which is complete in itself but contains overt as well as thematic links with Carroll's previous novels. We must read it to the end to realize that the departure from consensus reality began with the jocular open sentence. The joke turns out to contain a sharp sliver of truth, like a Halloween apple with a razor blade inside.

The reader must persevere for this payoff. The narrator, Harry Radcliffe, is not sympathetic, although that's partly the point. He's a prize-winning architect, a genius whom the world rewards because he is a genius. And because he's a genius, he's allowed to behave like a shit. He's snobbishly cosmopolitan and self-centred. He has two mistresses and two ex-wives, the legacy of a nervous breakdown, a dog he inherited from his guru (a dog which is both a real dog and more than a dog, a relative of *Bones of the Moon's* Mr Tracy), and a new commission from the Sultan of Saru, who is obsessed with dogs and wants Harry to build a Museum to them. Which Harry does, persevering through religious unrest (for dogs are considered unclean by Moslems), an earthquake, a revolution (led by someone out of the Lovecraft mythos), the death of his sponsor, and various dark portents whose meanings become clear only at the very end.

It is not a lovable book; there is a coldness to the cosmopolitan sheen, and nothing is more wearing than narcissism. Yet *Outside the Dog Museum* is, like all of Carroll's fictions, twisty and passing strange. Its message slowly shines through, and lingers long after its end.

The multilevel pun in the title of Terry Pratchett's *Reaper Man* (Gollancz, £13.99) heralds another Discworld novel, this one a pair of intertwined narratives. In the first, Death, the chap who speaks in capitals, retires and puts his scythe to use in his new employment as a farm labourer. The second describes the consequences of Death's disappearance on the city of Ankh-Morpork, where, like all the recently dead, the corpse of Wizard Windle Poons finds he just can't lie down, despite the best efforts of his fellow wizards. While Poons leads a shambling gang of undead against a threat to Ankh-Morpork whose harbinger is a proliferation of wire baskets on little wheels, Death learns what it is to be mortal, and must defend himself and what he has come to care for against a new, more terrible Death.

Pratchett explodes an armory of carefully timed puns and pratfalls to great effect, and yet in Death's narrative strand there is something more than finely-judged routines and patter, a sense of *caritas* and tempered melancholy which suggests Pratchett might be moving on from cunningly constructed narratives to those more felt than diagrammed, from the head to the heart.

Meanwhile, as observed by one of the characters in *They Came And Ate Us, Armageddon II: The B-Movie* (Bloomsbury, £14.99), "... The biro is back. I can almost make out the exercise book and the tobacco packet. It's Rankin, he's in the pub again and he's writing." Indeed. Because there is a sense that Robert Rankin is making it up as he goes along, slinging puns and running jokes, big and small, some which work and some which don't, into half a dozen subplots appended to the story of one Elvis Presley, sanctioned operative with a time-travelling brussels sprout called Barry in his head, whose mission is to prevent the AntiChrist triggering a nuclear holocaust. Quite apart from Rankin's rambling inventiveness, the plot involves a lot of time-travel, which means that there is no point in even beginning to try and explain what may or may not be going on, but everything is more or less brought together at the end, which is the beginning of the novel to which *Armageddon II* is the sequel. It does for Elvis novels what the *Sunday Sport* does for serious news reporting, and you can take that any way you please. Terry Pratchett liked it.

Regular readers of *Interzone* will already be familiar with the eponymous novella of Robert Holdstock's short story collection, *The Bone Forest* (Grafton, £13.99), a prequel to the events of his novels *Mythago Wood* and *Lavondyss*, and a further exploration of the primal mazes of Ryhope Wood and its actualization of the roots of myth. With the exception of one excursion into biological sf, the other stories are dark fantasies ranging across English history,

richly textured and especially strong when the power of the past works through into the present. In "Thorn," a Dark Ages' stonemason is driven to sabotage a new church by carving a symbol of the older religion which Christianity seeks to supplant; in "Scarrowfell," a young girl learns of the reality behind an ancient folk ritual. And in all the stories, history is made by the lives of the ordinary people, which Holdstock evokes with sympathy, and myth is the echo of history everywhere beneath the surface of the everyday, half-erased symbols underlying the scribbled palimpsest of our reality.

(Paul McAuley)

## Narcotic Effect Wendy Bradley

I think you have to be a man called Michael to be truly enthusiastic about *The Edge of Vengeance* (Volume Two of *Flight Over Fire*) by Jenny Jones (Headline, £14.95) as, in spite of cover puffs from Michael Moorcock and Michael Scott Rohan I remain unconvinced. The world in which the plot takes place is heavy on mysticism, symbolism, delusion, description and magic but light on characterization, plotting and internal logic. There is a certain compulsive narcotic effect as the plot works itself out but this is undercut by the final chapter which is irritating in the extreme.

Eleanor, the heroine, is a very thin character but I begin to see why Jones writes such an unbelievable present-day heroine into her story, aiming for a contrast between the hollow woman and the full rich world Jones creates for her to fall into—but it still doesn't work for me. Certainly I would say there needs to be a "story so far" for a new reader to be able to make any sense of anything. However there are compensations: the animate, over-ripe, vicious Desert Rose is a wonderful creation, the baby god who makes a waterscape in the desert is likeable but in the end, having finally given in to the hypnotic lyricism of the plot, I was infuriated by the "aha, but wait for volume three" ending.

In *The Sorceress and the Cygnet* (Pan, £15.99 hc; £7.99pb) Patricia A. McKillip demonstrates how the kind of elevated, hallucinatory language that I think Jones is aiming for can actually be made to work. The novel reads as though McKillip had dreamed the whole book in one of those transcendent dreams where everyday objects seem to have deep significance. She skilfully sets up a mythology and cosmology based on constellations, Cygnet, Blood Fox, Fire Bear, and human characters who become entangled with their struggles to come alive. It is fascinating and moving, like one of



those indoor fireworks that uncoils into a snake. Only this snake coils itself into your brain and doesn't blow away.

A way from elevated language and back to more immediately accessible work, I can recommend *The Magic of Recluce* by L.E. Modesitt Jr (Tor, \$19.95), a splendid fantasy that grips from the first sentence. Lerris is a bored teenager from the perfect continent of Recluce and, because of his boredom with all this perfection, is sent out into the rest of the world on "dangergeld," a kind of quest-cum-rite of passage, used to winnow out those who do not fit in to perfection. He finds that he is a "black-staffer," that the staff his uncle gave him as a parting gift is useful for more than hiking, and that he has an inbuilt power to act as a focus of Order and so combat the white-clad Chaos-masters. The world is, roughly, 18th century – coach and horses, unreliable pistols, the first steamships little used because of their potential for focusing chaos, and as well as creating a likeable world, Modesitt also creates the character of Lerris with considerable insight. The cry of "boring" that comes from adolescents in the fact of almost everything can be incomprehensible to those of us over our acne, but in Modesitt's hands Lerris' boredom is actually comprehensible.

The most interesting feature of the book to me is the glancing consideration of feminism with the women warriors, the woman order-mistress who is Lerris' counterpart, and Lerris' affection for the humble Deirdre, woodcrafter Destrin's daughter. However, much as I enjoyed Lerris' adventures, for once this is a book that really does cry out to be turned into a trilogy. Tamra's adventures next, please, and then a "Lerris and Tamra save the world" finale.

**The Lords of the Stoney Mountains** (*The Perilous Quest for Lyonesse Book Two*) by Antony Swithin (Fontana, £7.99) is a picaresque novel, or as Bruce Sterling's "Workshop Lexicon" has it, an *And plot*: "in which this happens, and then that happens, and then something else happens, and it all adds up to nothing in particular." This is a shame, because the beginning of the series, *Princes of Sandastre* which I reviewed in IZ 41, was definitely promising. Swithin has worked out a lot of the kinks in his style and is now writing a very satisfying likeable prose and has created a complicated and detailed world. However Simon and Avran set off to search for Lyonesse where Simon's father and brother may be; along the way they are attacked by mercenaries and nomads, rescued by distant relatives and wandering wizards, and meet a lot of nice people. But they don't find Lyonesse and they are no further on with their "quest" at the end of the book than they were at the beginning. They just have more tired feet.

I also enjoyed *The Tower of Fear* by Glen Cook (Grafton, £3.99), although the blurb writer does this one no favours by comparing it to Conan and the Gray Mouser stories. It is in fact an absorbing military-strategy novel about a city defeated when its sorcerer-ruler is killed and follows the plottings of the resistance, the rulers and the mercenary troops to gain or keep control of the city years later. The soul of the sorcerer is reincarnated in one of the city's children and there are child-stealers at work who are trying to find the right child and revive the sorcerer; the child himself will be "sacrificed" – killed. The people are realistic and likeable and the novel as a whole is fascinating like a chess game.

Finally there is *The Lost King* (*Star of the Guardians Volume 1*) by Margaret Weis – yes, half of Weis and Hickman – (Bantam, £3.99). This is a stirring tale of a mercenary spacepilot, a sad warrior woman and a boy who has a mysterious secret about his birth. There is also a telepathic dark warlord, a battle between a galaxy-spanning corrupt regime and the heroic independent spirits who battle for freedom, and shooting alien spacecraft whose only weakness is a one metre hatch surrounded by gun emplacements. "She will be a prisoner Captain. She is dangerous. You will remember that... Her mother was a princess of the Leiah system." I bet she was.

(Wendy Bradley)

## UK Books Received May 1991

*The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in italics at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.*

Asprin, Robert. *Phule's Company*. Century/Legend, ISBN 0-7126-5001-6, 268pp, trade paperback, £5.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 11th July.

Black, Campbell. *The Wanting*. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0920-2, 307pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1986; the Scottish-born author also writes thrillers as "Campbell Armstrong.") 4th July.

Bova, Ben. *Orion in the Dying Time*. Methuen, ISBN 0-413-64430-8, 356pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; sequel to *Orion* and *Vengeance of Orion*.) 30th May.

Bradbury, Ray. *I Sing the Body Electric!* Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21213-2, 331pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in the USA, 1969; the 17 stories date from the 1940s to the 1960s; this edition seems to have been added to, since one of the items – it's not clear which, perhaps the poem "Christus Apollo" – has a 1977 copyright date.) 23rd May.

Brosnan, John. *The Fall of the Sky Lords*.

"The final volume of *The Sky Lords* trilogy." Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04381-4, 284pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition.) 20th June.

Constantine, Storm. *Aleph*. Macdonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8355-9, 314pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Sf novel, first edition; sequel to *The Monstrous Regiment*.) 27th June.

Constantine, Storm. *The Monstrous Regiment*. Futura/Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8351-6, 344pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1989; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 36.) 27th June.

Cooper, Louise. *Inferno: Book 2 of Indigo*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21334-1, 241pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988; this and its companion [below] are the first Unwin sf or fantasy titles to be reissued by Grafton since the former company was absorbed into the latter under the umbrella of HarperCollins.) 23rd May.

Cooper, Louise. *Nemesis: Book 1 of Indigo*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21333-3, 246pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1988; this and its companion [above] are the first Unwin sf or fantasy titles to be reissued by Grafton since the former company was absorbed into the latter under the umbrella of HarperCollins.) 23rd May.

Coyle, Harold. *Bright Star*. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014447-1, 461pp, paperback, £4.99. (Near-future militaristic thriller, first published in the USA, 1990; this one involves a war in the Middle East, with the Libyans apparently as chief villains.) 30th May.

Coyle, Harold. *Team Yankee*. "A novel of World War III." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014759-4, 306pp, paperback, £3.99. (Near-future militaristic thriller, first published in the USA, 1987; in a 1990 foreword, the author apologizes for the fact that the end of the Cold War has rendered his fiction out of date.) 30th May.

Duncan, Dave. *The Destiny of the Sword: Book Three of The Seventh Sword*. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-965660-4, 338pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988.) 20th June.

Eddings, David. *Seeress of Kell*. "Book Five of The Malloreon." Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01207-0, 431pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991.) 23rd May.

Elton, Ben. *Gridlock*. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-19702-6, 340pp, hardcover, £9.95. (Humorous sf novel, first edition; the second novel from the well-known scriptwriter-comedian-journalist-novelist-playwright-TV personality [there ain't half been some clever bastards].) 13th June.

Follett, James. *The Doomsday Ultimatum*. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0346-6, 286pp, paperback, £3.99. (Near-future thriller, first published in 1976; this was the debut novel by Ken Follett's cousin, and the new edition has been revised.) 6th June.

Follett, James. *Trojan*. Octopus/Lime Tree, ISBN 0-413-45241-7, 490pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Near-future thriller, first edition; the plot concerns "violent death, industrial espionage, a space probe to Mars and a computer virus of unimaginable complexity.") 27th June.

Gentle, Mary. *The Architecture of Desire*. Bantam Press, ISBN 0-593-01952-0, 192pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received.) 8th August.

Gribbin, John, and Marcus Chown. *Reunion*. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04860-3, 285pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Sf novel, first edition; a sequel to the same authors' *Double Planet*, but set over 1,000 years later.) 6th June.

Harrison, Harry, and Robert Sheckley. *Bill*,



the **Galactic Hero on the Planet of Bottled Brains**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05004-7, 236pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it says "A Byron Preiss Book" on the title page.) 6th June.

Harrison, Harry, and David Bischoff. **Bill, the Galactic Hero on the Planet of Tasteless Pleasure**. Gollancz, ISBN 0-575-04981-2, 213pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; again, it's a "A Byron Preiss Book.") 6th June.

Henderson, Zenna. **The People Collection**. Introduction by Anne McCaffrey. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13659-X, 594pp, paperback, £5.99. (Sf omnibus, first edition [?]; contains the books *Pilgrimage*, 1961, and *The People: No Different Flesh*, 1966, together with four linked but previously uncollected short stories; these are minor classics of yesteryear which it's pleasing to see back in print; the author died in 1983; a small note inside says "This edition compiled by Julia Smith and Rog Peyton.") 20th June.

Hodgson, William Hope. **The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig'**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21098-9, 188pp, paperback, £3.50. (Horror novel, first published in 1907; this is the fourth title in Grafton's welcome reissue of Hodgson's principal works: the earlier books were *The House on the Borderland*, *The Night Land* and *Carnacki the Ghost Finder*.) 13th June.

Jones, Raymond F. **Renaissance**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21051-2, 383pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1951; originally serialized in *Astounding* in 1944, it has also been published in the past under the title *Man of Two Worlds*; it's another creaky "classic" by the author of the recently reissued *This Island Earth*.) 23rd May.

Kay, Guy Gavriel. **Tigana**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-013010-1, 688pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 43.) 30th May.

Kerr, Katherine. **Dragonspell: The Southern Sea**. "Volume IV of the epic Deverry series." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-20787-2, 495pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA as *The Dragon Revenant*, 1990.) 13th June.

Kerr, Katherine. **A Time of Exile: A Novel of the Westlands**. Grafton, ISBN 0-246-13555-7, 353pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991; there is a simultaneous trade paperback edition [not seen]; it's described as beginning "a new cycle" of Kerr's "Deverry" series.) 9th June.

Koontz, Dean R. **Twilight Eyes**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0293-1, 478pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987; this hardcover follows a 1990 mass-market paperback edition from Headline.) 9th May.

Koontz, Dean R. **The Vision**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0294-X, 270pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1977; this hardcover follows a 1990 mass-market paperback edition from Headline.) 3rd June.

Le Guin, Ursula. **The Eye of the Heron & The World for World is Forest**. Gollancz/VGSF, ISBN 0-575-05060-8, 301pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf omnibus, first edition; the two short novels were first published in anthologies in 1978 and 1972 respectively.) 6th June.

Lem, Stanislaw. **Solaris**. Translated by Joanna Kilmartin and Steve Cox. Faber and Faber, ISBN 0-571-16215-0, 204pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in Poland, 1961; this translation was first published in the USA, 1970; it's a classic work, here reprinted as part of the smart "Faber International Fiction" line rather than as sf.) 3rd June.

Lumley, Brian. **Tarra Khash: Hrossak! Tales of the Primal Land, Volume Two**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3610-0, 246pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy collection, first edition; we were taken to task by a couple of correspondents for saying that Philip G. Williamson's recent novel *Dinbig of Khimmur* had a silly-sounding title; well, we can safely say that this book has an even daffier moniker.) 13th June.

McAuley, Paul J. **Secret Harmonies**. MacDonald/Orbit, ISBN 0-7474-0544-1, 333pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA as *Of the Fall*, 1989; McAuley's second novel, available in a UK paperback edition for the first time.) 27th May.

Morrow, James. **The Wine of Violence**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-983070-1, 301pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1981; this was Morrow's debut novel, now appearing in Britain for the first time.) 20th June.

Myers, Amy, ed. **The Fifth Book of After Midnight Stories**. Hale, ISBN 0-7090-4531-X, 208pp, hardcover, £13.95. (Ghost-story anthology, first edition; contains new work by A.L. Barker, R. Chetwynd-Hayes, Brian Lumley, Jean Stubbs, the late J.C. Trewin and others.) 31st May.

Neiderman, Andrew. **The Devil's Advocate**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-976660-4, 313pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 20th June.

Niven, Larry, with Dean Ing, Jerry Pournelle and S.M. Stirling. **Man-Kzin Wars II**. Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4948-2, 306pp, paperback, £3.99. (Shared-universe sf anthology, first published in the USA, 1989; contains two long stories, one by Ing, the other by Pournelle and Stirling, together with an introduction by Niven.) 23rd May.

Peel, John. **Timewyrm: Genesys**. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Foreword by Sophie Aldred. Virgin Publishing/Doctor Who Books, ISBN 0-426-20355-0, 230pp, paperback, £3.50. (Shared-universe sf novel, first edition; the first of a new series which is not based on TV scripts.) 20th June.

Preuss, Paul. **Hide and Seek**. "Arthur C. Clarke's bestselling *Venus Prime* series." Pan, ISBN 0-330-31086-0, 281pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; a Byron Preiss-packaged book, it comes with "a special infopak of blueprints by Darrel Anderson.") 7th June.

Scott, Allan. **The Dragon in the Stone**. Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-8354-0, 301pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; this appears to be a first solo novel by an author best known for his collaborations with Mike Scott Rohan [writing as "Michael Scott"].) 23rd May.

Shatner, William. **TekWar**. Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13584-4, 300pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 20th June.

Simmons, Dan. **Phases of Gravity**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3602-X, 344pp, paperback, £4.50. (Mainstream novel about a man who walked on the moon; first published in the USA, 1989.) 13th June.

Smith, Cheryl. **The Falcon and the Serpent**. Monarch/Minstrel [1 St Anne's Rd., Eastbourne BN21 3UN], ISBN 1-85424-127-3, 318pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 17th May.

Stableford, Brian. **The Empire of Fear**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31575-7, 520pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1988; reviewed by Stan Nicholls in *Interzone* 27.) 7th June.

Stevens, Gordon. **And All the King's Men**. Pan, ISBN 0-330-???, 543pp, paperback, no price shown. (Alternative-world sf novel, first published in 1990; it's set in a 1940 where the

Nazis have successfully invaded Britain [now there's an original idea!]; proof copy received.) 6th September.

Williams, Michael. **Galen Beknighted: Dragonlance Saga Heroes II, Volume Three**. Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014375-0, 317pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 30th May.

Williams, Walter Jon. **Angel Station**. Orbit, ISBN 0-7088-4908-3, 393pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989.) 23rd May.

Wilson, F. Paul. **Reborn**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55129-6, 344pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1990; it states on the back cover that this is "the first of a three volume sequel to F. Paul Wilson's horror bestseller *The Keep*.") 6th June.

Wolfe, Gene. **Soldier of Arete**. Hodder/NEL, ISBN 0-450-55107-5, 342pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Nick Lowe in *Interzone* 39.) 6th June.

## Overseas Books Received

Brosnan, John. **The Sky Lords**. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-05964-7, 318pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first published in the UK, 1988.) 31st May.

Brust, Steven. **The Phoenix Guards**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85157-X, 335pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; prequel to Brust's "Vlad Tallos" series; it's described as "a fantasy homage to Alexandre Dumas and the swashbuckling sagas of Rafael Sabatini.") August.

Cadnum, Michael. **Saint Peter's Wolf**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-728-3, 335pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Horror novel, first edition; it comes with jacket commendations from Stephen Jones and Kim Newman ["the best werewolf novel in 15 years"].) 3rd June.

Douglas, Carole Nelson. **Cup of Clay**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85146-4, 330pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the opening volume of a new trilogy; proof copy received.) September.

Drake, David. **The Jungle**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85197-9, 282pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Sf novel, first edition; it's a sequel to Henry Kuttner's 1943 novella "Clash by Night," which is reprinted here as an appendix; proof copy received.) September.

Garey, Terry A., ed. **Time Frames: A Speculative Poetry Anthology**. Rune Press [Minnesota SF Society, PO Box 8297, Lake Street Station, Minneapolis, MN 55408], ISBN 0-960-26562-0, 97pp, hardcover, \$12. (Sf/fantasy poetry anthology, first edition; contains work by Ruth Berman, Mark Rich, Robert Frazier, Steve Sneyd, Geoffrey A. Landis and others.) Late entry: March publication, received in May.

Ligotti, Thomas. **Songs of a Dead Dreamer**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-721-6, 275pp, paperback, \$4.50. (Horror collection, first published [in this expanded edition] in the UK, 1989; reviewed by Andy Robertson in *Interzone* 34.) 3rd June.

Menick, Jim. **Lingo**. Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-628-7, 334pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Humorous sf novel, first edition.) 20th May.

Vance, Jack. **Ecce and Old Earth: Book Two of The Cadwal Chronicles**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85132-4, 436pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Sf novel, first edition [it may have been preceded by an Underwood-Miller limited edition]; proof copy received.) September.



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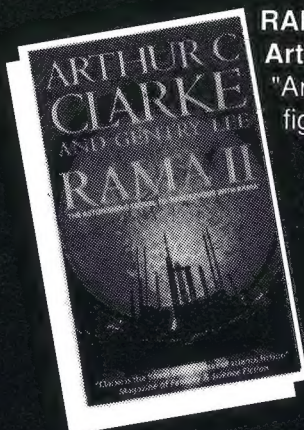
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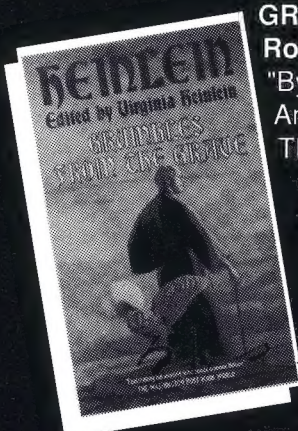
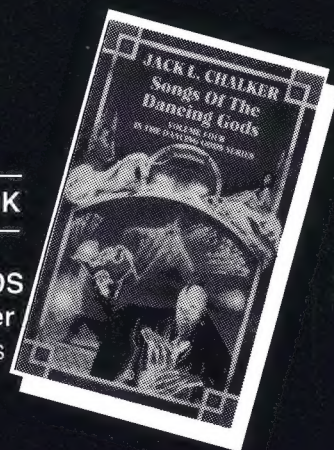
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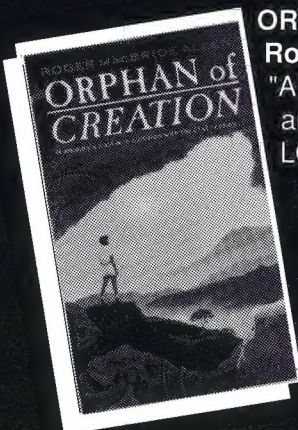
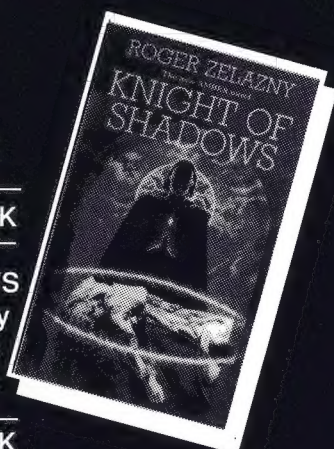
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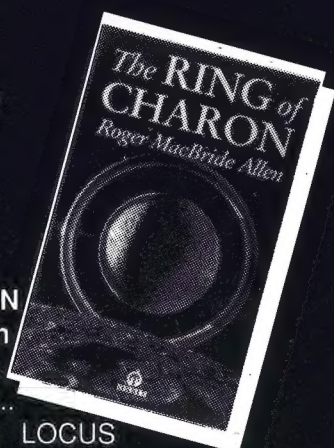
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